



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

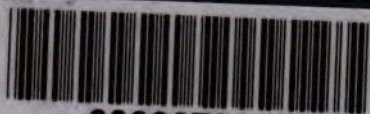
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

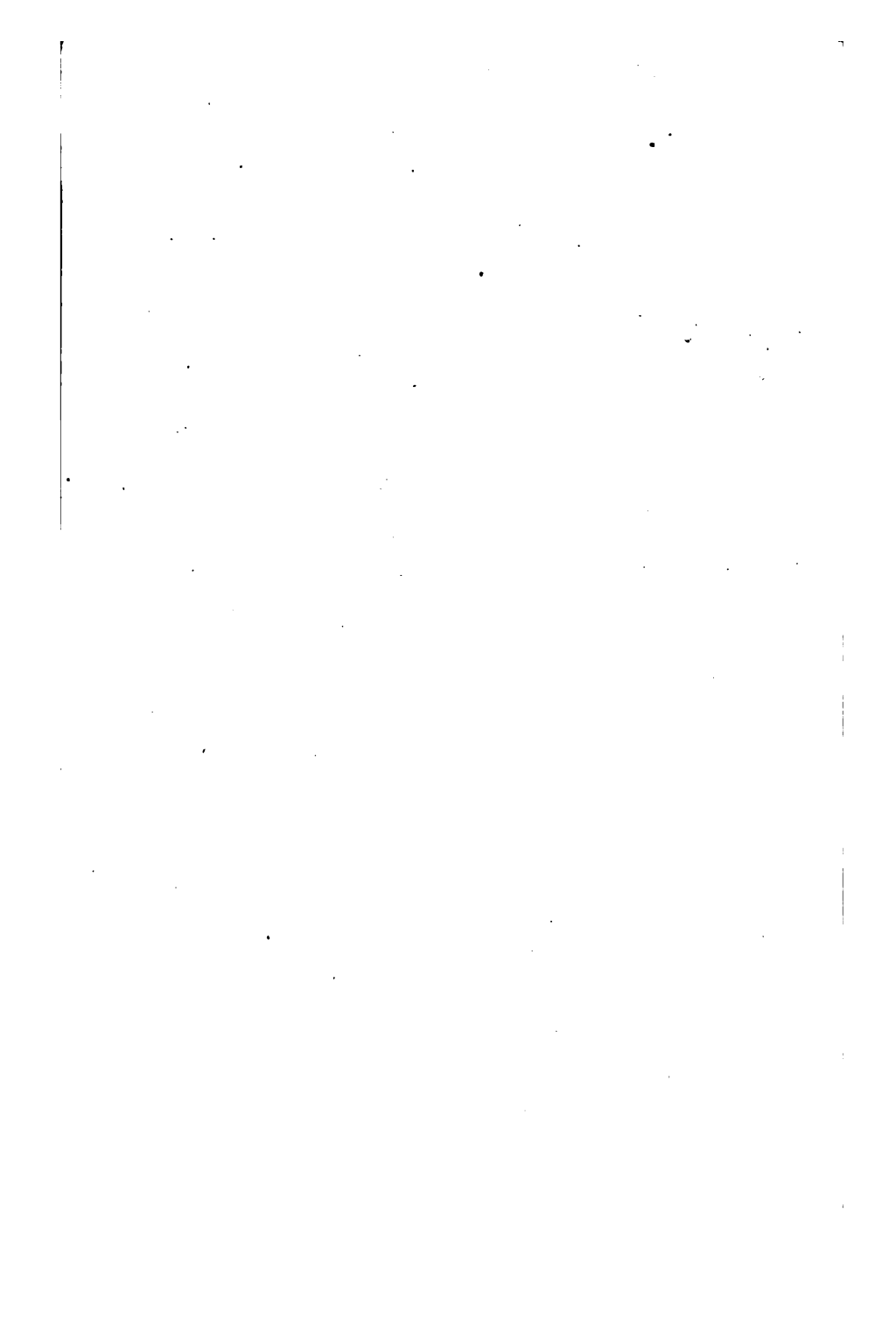
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600067204P





EGLANTINE.

VOL. II.



EG LANTINE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ST. OLAVE'S," "JANITA'S CROSS,"

"THE BLUE RIBBON,"

&c. &c.

"To labour, and to be content with that a man hath, is a sweet life."

Ecclesiasticus.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

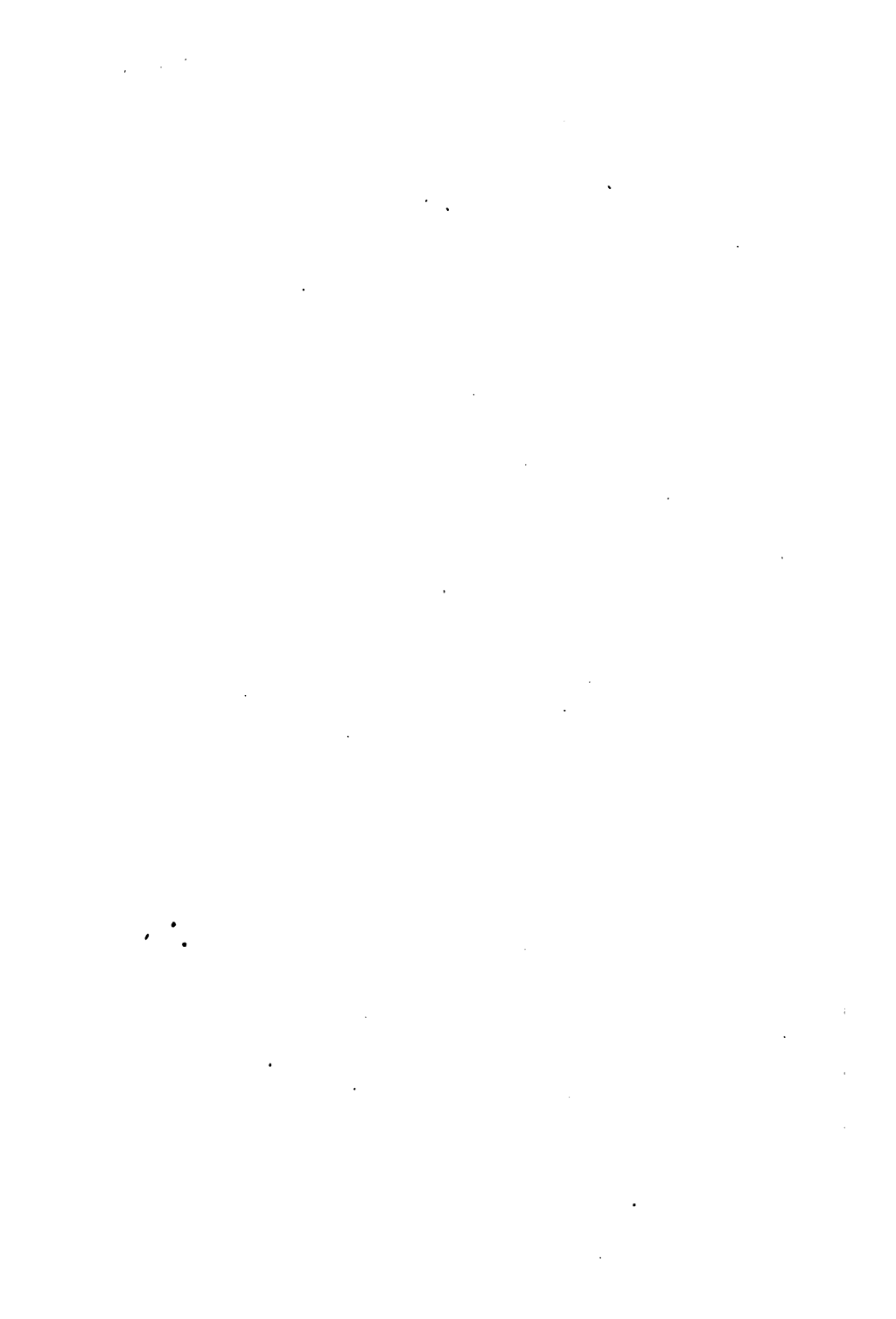


LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1875.

All rights reserved.

251. b. 819.



EGLANTINE.

CHAPTER I.

MY father and I talked of little else but that sermon all the day. It was such a one as had not been heard for many and many a year in Cove Rossington church. And so evidently the man's own too. Every word of it had been forged in the white heat of actual experience; you could tell that by the life glowing out from look and voice and manner.

"If he goes on preaching in this way," my father said, "the world will hear of him soon. If there is one thing we want,

it is earnestness. I almost think, sometimes, it is better for a man to be earnest in a mistaken cause than half-hearted in a good one—better for himself, at least.”

But Mr. Elphinston’s was not the “mistaken” cause. He wanted to teach us to be *real*. We had never been taught it before. His sermon was like a bomb-shell fired in amongst our peaceful, regular habits of thought, crushing them up, showing how useless they had been to us, how little effect, for the most part, what we believed had wrought upon what we did.

Not that Mr. Esliton—good, excellent man!—had lulled us to sleep by crying “Peace! peace!” when there was no peace. I am sure he taught us all he knew—and it was good, wholesome truth too,—but we had only seen one side of it. He was always laying down for us an excellent foundation of doctrine, telling us what we

ought to believe, and showing us by numerous proofs why we ought to believe it. His discourses upon the Apostles' Creed were to my mind as conclusive and satisfactory as anything could be, and gave me a most comfortable conviction of my Christianity, in being able to agree with him throughout the whole of his argument. But Mr. Elphinston rather damaged that comfortableness by showing us how we might believe all the three Creeds, and yet be very bad Christians—a state of things we had never realised before. Doctrine, according to his belief, was the foundation upon which the beautiful house of life must be built, and the scaffolding which afforded safe foothold to the builder. But it was not the house. We could not subsist upon our doctrines, any more than we could live with any sort of comfort and decency in a house which consisted of nothing but foundation and scaffolding.

I think we modern Cove Rossington people, poor and rich, coal and iron alike, had never had such a shake administered to us before—at least, not from that crumbling old pulpit. Perhaps we should have taken the burning fiery utterances a little more respectfully if they had been flung down to us by a hoary-headed man who had borne the burden and heat of the day, or if the hand that was now and then thrust forth, with no grace of oratorical gesture, but a sort of striking-home blow, to emphasise them, had borne upon it the decoration of bishops' lawn, or if a good warm comfortable gleam of scarlet had given us the assurance of a doctor's hood. But that a stripling—for really this Mr. Elphinston looked like little else,—with nothing but a bit of purple showing itself on the reverse aspect of his surplice, should dare to lecture us so plainly, and pull the covering off our quiet, decent, religious

lives, and show us to ourselves as we were, was a little too much. However, I think we took it as most people take unpalatable truth, thinking how exactly it fitted our neighbour's case.

I don't suppose, after the sermon was once begun, many of us took much note of the preacher's appearance, though during the reading of the prayers we had criticised him rather narrowly. In truth he was not a handsome man, but neither could anyone call him plain. If I had seen that face under a sailor's tarpaulin hat, I should have called it a thoroughly honest, good-tempered English face, full of resolution, kindness, and health. But there were no deep, anxious lines in it; there was no story, in cramp of brow or compression of lip, of the struggle and conflict and temptation through which I thought a man must have passed to learn what that man told us. -

His voice, as soon as he began to read, sent me back to the old days. It had Rae Morrison's Northumbrian accent, and warmed my heart towards him directly. I could have listened with a certain quiet content to the veriest common-places uttered in the speech which reminded me of all that I had ever known of happiness. But it was not the speech only which reminded me. There was just a touch of likeness in the frank, honest expression of the face; very little, but enough to make me feel at home with him.

"Well, what did you think?" quoth Miss Fidger, laying violent hands from behind upon my elbow, as soon as we were fairly out of the church. "Did you ever hear anything like that in your life before? Quite a new style of preaching for Cove Rossington, isn't it?"

"I fancy he wants to stir us up a little," I said. "For my own part, I felt very

much like an old woman who is having a good warm comfortable cloak, which she bought and paid for herself, pulled off her shoulders. It is uncommonly cold work, just at first."

"Well, Dora, my dear, I must say I felt very much in that way myself, though perhaps I should not have put it in the same words. I'm sure I always thought my cloak, at any rate, was bought and paid for honestly enough, and very warm it's kept me ever since I began to wear it; and I must confess I felt a little bit put about when that young man began to ask me if I had any right to it."

"Or what was worse still," I said, "showed you that it was full of holes and patches, and not fit to keep the cold away from you. I should think a respectable congregation never felt itself so shabbily dressed before. Fancy going to church in satins and velvets, and finding out, before

the sermon is half through, that you are a beggar in rags. It is humiliating, to say nothing of the cold."

"Well, my dear, we are all alike, and that is one consolation. In fact, I think our rags up here on the North Cliff are not nearly so bad as other people's. He scarcely left enough to those great coal and pit owners to keep them decently covered. Wasn't it splendid to hear him telling them how they ground the faces of the poor to make themselves rich, and how their splendid mansions and richly-furnished tables were the price of iniquity! It was beautiful! I never enjoyed anything more in my life."

"Yes; and when he talked about our sitting over our firesides on a Sunday afternoon, speaking evil of our neighbours, and pulling their characters to pieces, whilst we should think it a great sin to open a story-book or a newspaper, or perhaps greater still to go into a dissenting chapel."

“Well, my dear, I think he coloured it a little too strong there. I must say I object very much myself to newspapers and Dissent on a Sunday. A week-night service is all very well, for I do think the minister up at Bethesda is a clever man, in his way, and I don’t deny that the Dissenters have done a great deal of good in this place since the pit population came; but you know, as the clergyman said last Sunday, it is an evil and wicked thing to leave the Church of our fathers.”

“Then I am afraid our fathers were very evil and wicked,” said I, “or we should never have had a Reformation at all. I don’t see why it should be more evil to leave the Church of our fathers than the Church of our great, great, great grandfathers; and certainly we have most of us done that.”

“Ah! my dear, there you get beyond me. I cannot argue on religious subjects.

I only feel when we've got such a pretty old church, and such good prayers, and everything steady and straightforward, it's a pity to go after anything fresh. But I think Mr. Elphinston will fetch them back again. How he did walk into the rich people, to be sure! Old Rollekens might have been hearing him when he had that talk with Mrs. Ullathorne that you were telling me about."

"But that purple hood. *Ought* a man who isn't a bishop, or an archdeacon, or something of that sort, to talk to us so plainly about our cloaks?"

"Yes, I'm sorry about that hood. A Durham man, I suppose. I do call it a pity, for I like a man to be from one of the regular universities. I listen to him with so much more satisfaction, not to say profit, when I know he has gone through the regular course. I always have the same sort of feeling with a university man that I

have with port that has been laid down the proper number of years in a gentleman's cellar. You know you're drinking the right sort of thing."

"Except," I said, "as regards the university man, it is *not* always the right sort of thing. At least, if it is the right sort of thing, it comes to you in the wrong sort of way."

"Well, not always in the clearest of cut glass, I allow; but still, even then, you know that it has been in a gentleman's cellar, and that makes such a difference. Just the same, you know, as I say of my make-believe sable. I bought it at the best shop in Limeport, and I feel that it's respectable on that account. You mightn't think it, but I have more satisfaction in wearing that make-believe sable, because it was bought at a real good Conservative, old-fashioned shop, than I should have in the richest Russian out of those big-

fronted places that the coal and iron people go to. And in the same way I do like my port out of a gentleman's cellar."

"Well, then, all that I can say is, that a great deal of very poor stuff finds its way into gentlemen's cellars, and never seems to grow any richer for the time it spends there."

"That may be. But still, as I say, it comes out of the cellar, and so I can pay proper respect to it, as I can't even to a superior article which has been bottled at one of those paltry wholesale houses. I must confess that purple hood is a disappointment to me. Have you seen him to speak to him yet?"

"Oh, dear no! I did not even know he was to preach this morning, until the old sexton told me, as I was coming into church."

"I could have told you last night, then, for Mr. Collinson called again about those

Easter dues, and told me ever so much. He did not mention Durham, though, for I daresay he knows I'm very particular. He has come from a very rough place in the Midland Counties, worse even than we are now; for I do say that, so long as any of us North Cliff people remain, there is at least a little leaven of respectability in Cove Rossington. I suppose that accounts for his speaking to us so plainly."

"And where does he live?—at least, where is he going to live, as the Rectory is occupied?"

"Oh! he doesn't live anywhere just now."

"Poor man! How very uncomfortable! It is almost worse than not having a proper cloak to wear."

"Well, you know, I mean he is not settled yet. He walks over from Coley-Orton every morning, and goes back in the afternoon, until something is found for him in the shape of lodgings."

“And is he married?”

“Oh! no, nothing of the sort. Mr. Collinson says he has neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, wife nor child belonging to him. I daresay Mr. Dewtrie thought, because he had been in the Midland coal places, he would be just the thing for us; and of course we aborigines, who don't like a man any better for having a touch of the steam-engine about him, must take him as he is.”

And Miss Fidger, bidding me good morning, trotted away to her Sunday dinner.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT day, towards evening, I sallied forth to Joe Rollekins' cottage to have a talk with him about the sermon. I had seen the old man's eyes kindle like furnaces beneath his shaggy brows, as those quick earnest sentences were flung at us, and I knew that among all Mr. Elphinston's hearers that morning none would appreciate him better than Rollekins, the coastguardsman. Perhaps, too, his words would fall into no soil where they would quicken to a more abundant harvest.

I was detained on the way by young Jennet, who had come to spend a day or

two with his aunt, so that it was dusk when I neared Joe's cottage, and the fire-light, pouring out through the lattice window of the front kitchen, showed me a cosy enough picture. Mrs. Rollekins was moving to and fro, on household cares intent. Joe, as I thought at first, was sitting with his back to me by the fire, smoking a short pipe; but as I came nearer, the head of curling dark hair which topped the blue jersey did not belong to Joe at all, but to some stranger, a sailor or fisherman friend, most likely, who had looked in to have a smoke with him. Joe himself was in the shadow of the other side of the fireplace, sitting square and upright in his big chair. To sit very upright was his way of showing respect to anyone who came to see him. When my father went in, he always used to stand for ever so long, and when, after repeated requests, he did at last sit down, he always

squared himself with his elbows to his sides, instead of the jolly, free-and-easy attitude which he allowed himself, even in my presence.

I went straight up to him, saying, as I generally did in that cottage, what was uppermost in my thoughts,

“Well, Joe, I’ve come to talk to you about the sermon. *Wasn’t* it a sermon? I think, if we never had a box on the ears in our lives before, we had it yesterday, don’t you?”

To my surprise, Joe, instead of brightening up into eager interest, shifted uneasily on his chair, and his face turned as red as such a leathery, wrinkled old face could turn. Mrs. Rollekins’ perturbation, too, had a perceptible effect on the plates which she was arranging on the little table, for they rattled as if they had the palsy, whilst the good woman herself made sundry mysterious movements with her

thumbs and elbows in the direction of the fisherman.

Turning to him, then, for the first time, I perceived, with feelings that may be more easily imagined than described, that he was none other than our new curate, Mr. Elphinston.

Now I appeal to anyone who possesses the feelings of an educated English gentlewoman to say whether the sight of one's spiritual pastor and master, jack-booted, blue-jerseyed, bare-necked, with a short pipe in his mouth, and a check shirt collar loosely gathered together with a black silk handkerchief, is not a sight calculated to strike alarm into the mind of the average female parishioner, especially when that parishioner has been accustomed to see her former pastors and masters attired in proper black broad cloth, a trifle short in the waist, and proportionately long in the skirt, neat white Anglican collar, and soft

felt hat, a little "advanced," perhaps, but not of what might be called "extreme views," which were what Mr. Esliton never entertained on any subject.

It was worse, too, because I had spoken my mind so freely about the sermon. For a few seconds, I don't believe any four people, not convicted of absolute guilt, felt more uncomfortable than we did in Joe Rollekins' cottage. Joe and his wife fumbled and fidgeted; Mr. Elphinston fumbled and fidgeted too, twisting about in his huge jack-boots like a hermit crab in a shell too large for it. I stood still, not knowing what to do or say, and I daresay we all heartily wished each other somewhere else.

I was the first to recover my self-possession. Figuratively I sprang to the saddle of this somewhat restive situation, grasped the reins in my hands, struck spurs into the steed, and rushed to the rescue.

Literally I shook hands very cordially with Mr. Elphinston, a freedom which, being a middle-aged and respectable parishioner, I had a perfect right to use, and said to him—

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Elphinston. I only said what I thought, and I thank you very much for preaching us that sermon yesterday morning. But at first I did not know who you were, or I would not have spoken as I did.”

Because, of course, if our new clergyman was in the habit, like his great ancestor, Peter, of girding unto him a fisher's coat, he must not be surprised if we of the nineteenth century, whose ideas of apostolical succession did not extend to absolute identity of costume, made mistakes just at first.

“I—I am very sorry,” he stammered out at last, and his face grew redder and redder, and he twisted more and more un-

comfortably in his blue jersey, which was a world too wide for his slight build. Then the truth began to dawn upon me.

“Oh ! I understand. They are not your own clothes. Pray do not apologise.”

“I have had an awkward accident,” he said, looking timidly at the reflection of himself in Mrs. Rollekins’ best black japaned tea-tray, which was reared up against the opposite wall.

I could have laughed outright, but seeing his evident confusion, I felt it would be cruel to do anything of the sort. Besides, he seemed to have so little conceit of his own to help him through the difficulty. With Ted Ullathorne it would have been very different. I was going to beg him not to make any explanations, when Joe came to the rescue.

“Yes, Miss Dora ; it were about as awkward as could be. He was going round by the beach over the rocks towards

Coley-Orton, and the tide was coming in, as it's played many a one the same trick afore; and it took and got right round him as he was just walking on over the near reef, and there was nothing for it, if he didn't want to be drowned, but jump in and wade for it; and he comed in dripping like a porpoise, and I had to fetch him my Sunday clothes, and my wife put his things in the back kitchen to dry, and then we set on a bit extra fire here, and I told him there was nothing so good to keep the cold out as a pipe; and thanks to your father, Miss, I don't need to be ashamed of the 'bacca. It's the real sort, what he gives me, every bit of it."

"I am so sorry for you, Mr. Elphinston," I said, very politely, lest he should think that the pipe and the jack-boots made any difference. "I hope you will not take cold."

"Oh! he'll none do that," said Joe

cheerily. "He's only to wait a bit, and the things'll be as dry as a bone to-morrow morning. Though how he's to walk back to Coley-Orton in them there," and he pointed to the blue jersey and the checked shirt, "and him the man he is, beats me. It isn't what we've been accustomed to see our parson do."

"Must you really go back to Coley-Orton to-night?" I asked, for Mrs. Rollekens, after a visit to the back kitchen, returned, reporting the clerical garments as "sopping wet" still.

"Yes, I am obliged to return to-night. I have no place here to stay in. I only come to Cove Rossington for a few hours in the day, until I can find proper rooms."

"If you would allow me to tell my father, I am sure we should be very happy to offer you our hospitality for the night."

"Thank you," and again that twist and fidget in the big boots, "but I could not

think of going anywhere in—in this condition. I am afraid you are very much shocked already.”

And he glanced at the short pipe, which he had taken out of his mouth when I came in.

What a shy, awkward, nervous man he seemed, completely floored by a little disaster, which anyone else would have laughed over ! Was this really the brave young champion who had flung his firebrands of truth at us only the day before, not caring where they fell or whom they burned ; who had told us so fearlessly the truth about ourselves, shaking us out of our quietness, facing us with our stupor, and ignorance, and conventionality, as though armed with the authority of all the bishops in Christendom ? And yet, because one of his parishioners had happened to catch him in a dilemma which might have befallen the primate of England, under similar cir-

cumstances, he lost all his self-possession, and became as embarrassed as a school-boy.

I could see he wanted to go and look at his clothes for himself, to find out whether it was possible to make a journey in them that night, but he did not like, by walking across the room, to exhibit himself still further to me in his unclerical attire. I thought the kindest thing I could do would be to go away.

"Joe," I said, "do not let Mr. Elphinston run the risk of a bad cold by putting his things on again. Miss Fidger's nephew is staying with her just now. I will go and send him up to you, with what is needed."

And with a general good-bye to them all, I went away, feeling that they would be much more comfortable without me. I think I never saw a man so pitifully confused by an accident which only ought to

have shaken the stiffness out of him, and made him feel more at home with his new people. I could not help laughing heartily to myself as soon as I was safely out upon the beach. The whole thing would show me only its ludicrous side. I got the blue jersey of to-day and the surplice of yesterday, the Durham hood of the pulpit and the jack-boots of the cottage, the fiery words and the short pipe, the fervid, fearless eloquence, and the awkward, twisting embarrassment, so curiously mixed up together that I could scarcely tell at last which place each belonged to. One moment I saw the surplice and the pipe in juxtaposition; then the jack-boots in the reading-desk; then the bare neck and the check-shirt in the pulpit.

I think never any parishioner was in such a muddle about where to put her curate, and what to do with him; and yet all the time I was so sure that we had got

the right man in the right place at last.

I told my story to Miss Fidger, making it appear as serious as possible ; and Mr. Jennet went off directly with a carpet-bag, containing a complete change of dress for the unhappy man. Before very long I found that this little adventure was likely to issue, as many little beginnings do, in events which would change the whole course of my life.

CHAPTER III.

FOR next afternoon, a sweet, still, sunny afternoon, though it was yet but Eastertide, as my father and I were sitting on the pear-tree stump at the top of our garden, idly watching the long waves roll in upon the beach, our meditations were broken by the advent of Miss Fidger, who evidently had something upon her mind.

She was generally a little bit broken and uncertain in her manner of entering upon any subject, but this afternoon she was positively incoherent, to say nothing of a fidgetty embarrassment almost equal to that which I had witnessed on the previous evening.

"You are quite sure—now I do hope you won't mind my having come," she said, as, after the usual greetings, I made room for her, and offered her a rhubarb leaf by way of sunshade, for the afternoon light beat full upon us as we sat there.

"Mind your having come? Oh dear, no!" I replied, thinking most likely she referred to the squeezing we all had to endure for the accommodation of a third person. "So long as you are comfortable, I am sure my father and I don't mind it at all. We were watching the curious tinting of the water in the little bit of bay that we can see from here. There is such a clear line where the red sand ends, and the patches of olive-brown weed begin; and then, farther off, you get the deep blue of the sky reflected. I always think this is such a pretty little bit."

"Yes, very indeed," said Miss Fidger, hurriedly. "I always hold up for our

coast scenery being as pretty as any in this neighbourhood. And, as I said to Gilbert, there was only one thing in the way, and that was that you might feel grieved at being spoken to about it, and you know I would not grieve either you or Mr. Leslie for anything in the world. But he was so very anxious that I should mention it. He said if I didn't he would; and men always make such a muddle of things."

And Miss Fidger fumbled about with her rhubarb-leaf, and seemed almost as much out of her element as Mr. Elphinston the night before. Being reminded of him made me ask whether the clothes fitted, and that remark floated Miss Fidger into smooth water directly.

"Almost as well as if they had been made for him, my dear, thank you. I wanted to get him brought up, somehow, but I couldn't manage it. He was fated,

though, to have a touch of the sea about him, for the only outside thing my nephew could spare was his pea-jacket, with the great flaps and pockets and buttons—not at all the sort of dress, you know, that we are accustomed to see our clergyman in; but as it was dark when he went back to Coley-Orton, it would not be of so much consequence. Gilbert went with him most part of the way, and first thing this morning he came back with the things.”

“He is no worse for the drenching, I hope?”

“Not a bit, that I could see. But oh, what a man he is!”—and Miss Fidger emphasised this remark by a vigorous shake of the rhubarb-leaf—“what a man he is, my dear! We haven’t had such a man in this parish ever since I can remember; and as humble and unassuming as a child.”

“Yes,” I replied, “I could see last

night that he is unassuming enough—a little too much so, indeed, for his own comfort. But what a thing for him to have to go backwards and forwards between here and Coley-Orton every day, just like a running postman. Can't he find a place at Cove Rossington good enough for him to live in?"

"My dear, that is just what I had upon my mind. Your father has gone, hasn't he?"

And Miss Fidger peeped cautiously round in front of me.

"Yes, he is walking yonder, higher up on the cliff."

"That's right. I could say it so much better just to yourself alone. Well, you know, as I said, he came in this morning with the clothes, and we were having a long talk about it. He would like to go into some quiet family, and be boarded with them, having his own rooms to him-

self. Gilbert said I couldn't do better than squeeze up a little and take him into my cottage, seeing that I have nobody but myself to look after."

"And a very good suggestion too," I said. "Why didn't you settle it, there and then?"

"Because I thought of something else. I should consider it a privilege to have such a man under my roof, for I'm sure he's one in a thousand; but just look at me. In the first place, I should talk him to death, for when I once begin I never know where to stop, which, for a man who has sermons to make, would be rather an awkward state of things; and besides, I'm no companion for an intellectual man; And then I've only got one spare room, and, now that Gilbert's port is so near, I should like to be able to take him in and make him comfortable when he comes this way. And then Gilbert himself suggested

—but oh! Dora, my dear, I wouldn't mention it for the world, if I had the least idea that you would be grieved about it."

The wonderful "it" dawned upon me now. Miss Fidger thought the new curate might be boarded and lodged at our house.

I must say my pride gave a little rebellious fling at the thought. I was conscious of a touch of indignation against good Miss Fidger for proposing it, and for a moment the poor question, "What will people say," had entire possession of my mind. However, I knew that it had been proposed in the simplest good faith, and I tried to say, without the least touch of consciousness,

"Oh! I understand. You think it would be very nice if we could take him instead."

Miss Fidger heaved a great sigh of relief.

"That's the very thing, dear. And if you only knew how I have turned it over

and over and over in my own mind all to-day, and tried to put it in the most pleasant way, so that you might not be hurt at my mentioning it. And really so little trouble, when one comes to think about it, for this house is such a great rambling place for a family of two; and your dear father would be such a stay to the young man. And as for anybody making remarks, which did just flash across my mind, on account of his being a single man——”

That never had flashed across mine. No, not even the most scandal-loving person, man or woman—for, whatever people say, there is not much difference between them, as regards love of gossip—could hint at a touch of danger to Mr. Elphinston's peace from daily companionship with my elderly plainness and quiet, ordinary ways. And as for *my* peace, that was anchored where no companionship

could ruffle it any more. I told Miss Fidger I thought we need not trouble ourselves about what people might say on that subject.

"No, my dear. Only some people will talk about anything; and it is not everybody who thinks you so plain and unprepossessing as you think yourself. But we have settled that part of the business. And now you will speak to your father about it, will you not? I could not bear to mention it to you in his presence, for fear it should wound him. I do hope he will take it kindly."

"Oh! yes," I said, forcing myself only to look at the broad plain path of expediency. "It would be a very acceptable addition to my father's income. And, you know, when one has been reduced to half an egg in a pudding, one cannot well fall much lower."

"Not if one's respectability depends

upon eggs, my dear, which I hope is not the case with you; and as for myself, I was obliged to give over using them long ago, so that we are both at the bottom of the ladder. I was thinking it all over in my own mind, if you'll excuse my taking such a liberty, and there's that dear little room opening through the closet in the bow-windowed room, would be the very thing for a study for him; and as for bedrooms, you seem to have any number of them. And you wouldn't mind his boarding with you, which is what he would like to do, if he could be received into any upper-class family. I can assure you he is quite a gentleman."

"Even though he has not been in a gentleman's cellar for the proper number of years?"

"My dear, I was a goose. One cellar is as good as another. Everything depends upon what sort of wine it is. And Mr.

Elphinston is the right sort, if only he was not so dreadfully shy and unassuming. Why, if he had a tithe of Ted Ullathorne's assurance, he would think the world was not good enough for a man who could preach such a sermon as he gave us on Sunday morning. He had heard of your father's name, and when I proposed it to him he seemed to think it was quite too great an honour to be taken under such a man's roof."

"But another thing," I said. "I am sure he would not come to us if he knew I was the lady who had seen him in his fisher's coat, and all the rest of it."

"My dear, he doesn't know. I saw he was dreadfully upset about that, and so I didn't tell him who the lady was; it would only have made him feel uncomfortable. When you know each other well enough to have a good laugh over it, you will be all right. It's a providential opening, Dora,

my dear, that's just what I believe it is. And now I may tell Mr. Elphinston, when he comes to know about it this evening, that you are willing to think it over; at least, you will ask your father first, and I will come in first thing after tea, to hear what he says about it. Mr. Elphinston was to call on his way back to Coley-Orton."

I promised to speak to my father at once. He offered no opposition. I believe anything like anxiety about what people would say never entered his grand and simple mind in connection with the honest earning of one's living. He said, if Mercy could take the extra work, and I could take the extra responsibility, the society of a man like Mr. Elphinston might be very pleasant to us; and we, in our turn, might be able to afford him useful companionship.

Mercy was summoned to the parlour,

and the plan laid before her for approval. She accepted it very cheerfully, with the proviso of a girl to help on busy days; and so, when Miss Fidger came in after tea, we were able to tell her that we should be happy to receive Mr. Elphinston. I stipulated that I should furnish no bills, the saying of "Thank you" for silver and gold being a thing I could not bring myself to. Once a month he was to pay us a certain sum for his board and lodging. Everything else that he wanted he was to look after for himself. He was to have the little parlour off the bow-windowed room for his study, and we were to let each other alone as much as we liked. Miss Fidger was also cautioned again not to tell him that I was the lady whom he had met under such untoward circumstances in Joe Rollekins' cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL next day I had a lurking hope that perhaps Mr. Elphinston would decide not to come to us. The question of "appearances"—that question which none but very exceptionally noble-minded women, or very imprudent ones, can afford entirely to put aside, and which, in one form or other, rules the greater part of our social life—would keep starting up before me. Especially I wondered what Mrs. Ullathorne would say. She was a woman who would look upon the thing simply in its material aspect of a contrivance for making a little extra money, and we should lose our position accordingly.

She was a woman, too, who had such a charming and graceful way of making you look pitiful to other people, which was more galling to me than being made to look ridiculous. "Those poor Leslies!" she would say to the fashionable favourites of her set; and the way in which it was said would place us at once in the deepest limbo of helpless ignominy.

I was not heroine enough to view such a state of things with calmness. I began to wish that nothing had been suggested. I ran over in my own mind the trifling, apparently accidental chain of circumstances which had led to the arrangement being made at all. If I had not happened to go to the cottage just at that particular time, or if Miss Fidger's nephew had not happened to be at home, or if I had not happened to think of him as likely to help our poor curate out of his dilemma, or if he had not happened to walk part of

the way home with Mr. Elphinston, and find out that he wanted rooms in Cove Rossington, or if Miss Fidger had not happened to be at home when he brought home that carpet-bag next morning,—then the thing would not have come into any sort of shape at all, and——

And I should never have written this story, so there is an end of it.

And yet I should have been disappointed if Mr. Elphinston had not come to us. I wanted very much to know him. I felt that our minds were in sympathy with each other. He had gone far beyond me in his search after truth. His mind was altogether grander, finer, more daring, more original than my own; but yet I could follow, with no feeling of strangeness or danger, the path he led. He was but putting into shape for me thoughts which I had been dimly thinking out for myself through all these years of reflection; I

scarcely dared to believe in their truth until I heard them from other lips; but when I did once hear them, they started up into quick, beautiful life, and became at once realities for me. Anyone whose world of thought is solitary and very vivid, will be able to understand the keen delight which I felt when, for the first time, I was able to believe in myself.

Then I knew I could do a great deal for him. If he had been a man of great self-assertion and self-possession, then, in spite of our mental sympathy, I should have stood apart from him. For though a man's good conceit of himself is unquestionably a capital locomotive on the railroad of life, I always like to keep at a safe distance from it, reserving my admiration for the effects accomplished rather than the manner of their performance. But Mr. Elphinston was almost like my father in shyness and humility. It might be—very

likely it was—the shyness of intense pride, like my father's; but it was a shyness which drew me wonderfully to him, and made me long to serve him and be of use to him. I could sympathise with that, too, for I had plenty of it myself, though my quiet life had kept me from being inconvenienced by it so much as he was likely to be. Would he come, or would he not come?

The question was settled the day after Miss Fidger's visit by a note from Mr. Elphinston himself.

It was a very courteous note, quite different, I think, from the usual manner in which people signify their intention of conferring benefits on other people by taking and paying for their rooms. He said he was very much obliged to my father and myself for our kindness in allowing him to find a resting-place with us, and he should try to arrange his plans so as to give as little trouble as possible. Every

word in the note had its own work to do, and there was not one which could have been spared without spoiling the whole. If I had needed encouragement about the step I had taken, that letter would have given me it; for a man who makes few words serve his purpose generally gives little trouble in other ways.

“And so grateful as he was, too, when I told him you had agreed to take him next Saturday,” said Miss Fidger, who came in when all was settled, to see if she could help me. “Anyone might have thought you were doing him the greatest kindness in the world—which of course I consider you are, though it is not every young man who would have looked upon it in that light. And when I told him what you said about money matters, and so forth, he seemed to understand at once, and spoke about it in a way which convinced me that he had the feelings of a gentleman. In-

deed, he almost seemed to take me back to my own young days, when men knew how to treat a lady, and did not think all the rest of the world was made just to serve their own ends and turns."

How well I could believe that already of John Elphinston !

"You have done the right thing, my dear, depend upon it," continued Miss Fidger, "and I have made you a pat of my very prettiest fairy butter, and some of those little fancy biscuits, just to have on the table when he comes in. And if ever you happen to be driven into a corner for anything, now do remember that you have nothing to do but send over to me, and whatever I can do for you, I will, with the greatest pleasure. I really feel, you know, as if I were in a sort of way responsible for you both, having been the first to mention it."

I was glad she did, for when the affair

was finally settled, I began to feel as if I needed some one to support me in what I had undertaken. I knew, though Mr. Elphinston would be content with very little, he had the capacity for receiving almost any amount of kindness, and would starve without it, even whilst he said not a word.

What trouble Tyne and I took to get that little study ready for him, and how sadly the romance was taken out of our work by the thought that he would pay so much a month for it!

"I wish he was going to be a guest," said Tyne. "It will be perfectly awful the first time you take the money from him. You will both of you turn as scarlet as Mercy's Sunday cloak."

"How do you know that he will care anything about it?" I said.

"How do I know? Why, in the same way that I know most things—by feeling

them. He is as shy as a mouse ; you can tell it by the way he goes up and down the pulpit stairs and into the reading-desk. It is a mercy for him that he has a surplice to wear, or he would never know what to do with his hands. And that shows, Aunt Dora, that he does not belong to the aristocracy."

"Nobody said he did. I fancy what patent of nobility he has comes direct from his Maker. But I won't have you quizzing him, Tyne, just because he doesn't happen to be one of the drawing-room pets you met at Bonnermouth."

Tyne only tossed her head.

How we arranged and re-arranged, and altered and re-altered the old-fashioned furniture, so as to give the prettiest effect on first entering the room ! The window was in a deep recess, overlooking the beach. I put an arm-chair there, just where the finest prospect could be seen, and I draped

the curtains as gracefully as I could, so as to make the recess into almost a little room on its own account. Fine, rich, stiff old curtains they were, too, none of your cheap damask pieces of flimsiness, that show every streak of light through, but stout, handsome paduasoy, which, after having done duty for forty years, looked, if not quite so fresh, every whit as respectable as when my mother brought them, part of her wedding outfit, to the new home.

He was to come on Saturday afternoon, in time for tea, and we decided that he should not be shown into the study until twilight had begun to gather a little, so that the fire would make its pleasant, dancing shadows over the room; and I put dainty bits of old china here and there, comfortably out of the way of toes or elbows, and piles of my father's books, and a bronze lamp of antique device on the

reading-table by his chair. The flowers I left to Tyne.

"He might be a prince of the blood-royal, you make such a fuss over him," said the girl, with a half-disdainful sweep of her stately white neck. "I would have let him take things as they were. Men don't care so much when they are waited on and prepared for so wonderfully. There, do you think he will like *that*?"

And Tyne set a little vase on a bracket over the writing-table. I would not have any ornaments set about on the tables, for whether men like being cared for or not, I do know they dislike having to pick their way about a room, for fear of knocking glass and crockery to pieces. It was a very old-fashioned little china vase, but she had made it lovely with clusters of primroses, and the olive-brown, scarlet-stemmed leaves of the young sycamore. And on another bracket she put a tall

Venetian glass, trailed round with sprays of ivy, and crowned with two or three plume-like stalks of grey hyacinth. How easily she arranged them, yet with such a proud indifference !

“I wonder if he will ever look at them. Auntie Dora, I don’t believe he thinks half so much of coming here as you seem to think about it. You won’t get a bit of sleep to-night, poor little thing, for wondering if he is comfortable or not !”

To think of Tyne, whom I had hushed to sleep on my knee thirteen years ago, looking down upon me from the height of her beautiful maidenhood, and saying to me, “Poor little thing !” We Auntie Doras have a great deal to bear from these young people. Well, I had felt just the same myself once, though I cannot fancy any power in heaven or earth making me so audacious as to say to my Aunt Lois, “Poor little thing !” My girlish

mischievous had never been allowed to spurt up to such heights. Ah, me ! the wonderful respect I felt for her, the fear and trembling with which I ever thought or did anything for myself in those girlish days.

And Tyne was half laughing at me now. Tyne in her bright young fulness of life, with a whole world ministering to her enjoyment, and the rosy glow of hope resting on all that was not steeped in the sunshine of actual, present gladness, little knew what trifling interests can stir and touch the current of a quiet woman's life. Since it was settled that Mr. Elphinston should come to us, I had scarcely had another thought than making that room ready for him, or pondering how I might add to his comfort in it. It was my place now to minister ; it was hers to be ministered unto. It was my work to adjust my life to the lives of other people ; it was her pleas-

ure to have the lives of other people adjusted to her own. She took gladness with the easy, natural freedom of one whose birthright it is. I received it, when it came to me, with humble reverence, as a stranger guest whose visits were, like those of the angels, few and far between. She looked for joy in everything. I only remembered it. Yet Tyne was a royal, splendid girl. She only needed love and sorrow to make her a perfect woman. And they would both come in their own time.

There was a ring at the bell, as I stood considering the finished work of my hands.

“That’s Mr. Elphinston,” said Tyne, making a dash for the closet which led into the bow-windowed room. “I shall just have time to get out of the way before Mercy goes to the door. Tell me, Auntie Dora, if he takes any notice of the flowers; but I’m quite sure he won’t.”

CHAPTER V.

I SLIPPED across into the parlour where the tea-table, duly furnished forth with Miss Fidger's fairy butter and plate of biscuits, was arranged, and standing by my father's side, waited to receive the new-comer.

I had never seen him before, except in canonicals, or blue jersey and jack boots, and I really thought, as he came in, that another accident must have befallen his clerical outdoor dress; for he made his appearance this evening in a suit which any young banker's clerk, of not extensive means or flashy tastes, might have lent him for the

occasion. I found afterwards that, unless in company or on duty, he did not much care to make an exhibition of his cloth.

He came in hesitatingly, with the bearing of a man who is full of doubts as to the reception that may be accorded him. Evidently he had not sufficient confidence in his own merits to take a bold stand upon them, as the Ullathorne family did upon theirs. They used to swim so gracefully into a room, and meander about with the easiest self-possession; and the air of amiability with which they used to get into conversation with anybody and everybody was a perfect study for people who wished to learn the art of making themselves agreeable. If Mr. Elphinston always entered the presence of strangers with the embarrassment which ours seemed to produce, I can only say that social life must have been a great bore to him.

In my new character of landlady I had

to come forward and present him to my father, who received him with grave, lofty courtesy. People at first always thought my father very proud, and I do not wonder at it. He certainly had a way of placing an apparent distance between himself and anyone else, which was rather chilling. He used little of the small coin of social currency, and he never said what he did not mean, which of course limited his range of remark very much, when receiving people for the first time. I was once foolish enough to wish that he would launch out a little more into empty compliment, and so make himself more popular with strangers; but I learned to be prouder of his honest silence than of most men's fulness of speech.

I think for awhile we all felt very uncomfortable. I am sure I did. I could not think of anything to say, nor could Mr. Elphinston, who shifted nervously in

his chair, instead of boldly taking the lead in conversation, like a man and a clergyman. Mercy brought in the urn and lighted the lamp, and I had to give her some little directions about domestic matters.

When I turned again, Mr. Elphinston was looking curiously at me, with a mixture of fun and discomfort in his eyes.

"I think I have seen you before," he said at last.

"Yes," I replied. "I met you last Monday in old Joe Rollekins' cottage. I hope you are no worse for your accident."

And then feeling, as the whole incident came back upon me, an uncontrollable disposition to laugh, I thought I had better yield to it. My father did the same, and so did Mr. Elphinston, and in a general outburst of merriment we all agreed once and for ever to abolish the bands of ceremony.

How my father enjoyed the account of the adventure after that ! With what keen, quiet, racy humour John Elphinston told it, passing silently, however, over my little bit of discomfiture about the sermon ! How easily and naturally he seemed to unfold, when once he found that he might be quite at home with us ! It was half amusing to note the innocent, boy-like way in which he put out little feelers of friendliness, so fearful apparently of going too far, yet so glad to feel that he might be at ease, that we could understand each other.

I think, if people are to be friends at all, they soon find it out. We did. Entering into each other's confidence through the gate of that hearty laugh, we soon found ourselves talking without the least effort over the few outward interests which we as yet possessed in common. The thing I had been fearing and hoping about, for five

interminable days, had come at last, and here we were as comfortable as if we had known each other for years. How pleasant it was to strike out little flashes of light on our points of contact, to fling hints of thought and feeling, and find them caught with such ready sympathy; to find, as it were, pieces of ourselves in each other, which made us no longer strangers. He was so different from the musty old professors, too. They talked about abstractions, or facts drier than abstractions; we talked about ourselves, the human nature which is at once sadder, sweeter, finer, nobler than all science.

After tea, I slipped away to see that the fire was burning brightly enough to make the lights and shadows which I so much depended upon for the beauty of the little study. It did indeed look very cosy. I did not know what his literary tastes might be, but I thought I could not get very far

wrong with Shakespeare, Spenser, and Raleigh's History of the World, which books accordingly I had heaped together on a footstool by the fire, side by side with Miss Fidger's *Times*, which she sent to us every afternoon. And I had put a card on the table with the hours for our meals, the coming in and going out of the daily posts, and the tradesmen's days for taking orders, so that he might see we were people of method.

Then I gave another look round. Through the half-drawn curtains a reach of grey twilight and ocean distance was to be seen. The quiet, purposeful sound of the flowing tide came clearly up from the beach, with what seemed to me would be companionship for a busy man, either in work or rest. Tyne's flowers, and the shadows of them which the flickering firelight threw upon the walls, were very lovely. I had done all for him I

could ; I hoped he would be very happy.

It might be a foolish thing to do, but the feeling came over me just then, and I clasped my hands and said a prayer for him, that his life lived in that little room might be sweet and pleasant to him. Then I came away.

He was talking eagerly and earnestly to my father about the place, its rapid development, the different needs of the different classes of population, the evils both of excessive labour and excessive wealth amongst us. But seeing me with the lighted lamp in my hand, he rose at once, evidently taking for granted that it was time for him to go. I could not help feeling half amused at his anxiety to do right, to fall into our ways, to give us as little trouble as possible. The idea that we could enjoy his conversation so much as to desire it throughout the evening did not apparently occur to him.

"Shall I show you to your study?" I said.

Without a word he followed me, and I put him into the little room, leaving my lighted lamp outside.

"There is the bell," I said, pointing to it, "and Mercy will come to you if you want anything."

He smiled, perhaps at the quaintness of the name, and I came away. Somehow I wanted him to get the impression of the room by himself. And I felt as if words spoken then would chase away the presence of that little prayer.

Of course my father and I had a long talk about him. We agreed that we liked him very much, and that we could be very comfortable together. I think my father was pleased with his simplicity, with his great diffidence in advancing his own opinions, whilst yet he was so bold and fearless in saying out what he felt to be, not opin-

ion, but truth. He was also a man of few words in talking about himself, or what he had done, or where he had been ; and that suited my father, who could not tolerate anything like egotism.

We heard him stepping about in the room, for it was very close to our parlour. I amused myself by fancying how he would be examining the quaint, old-fashioned things, different, most likely, from what he had been accustomed to see in the Midland coal districts ; reading the titles of the books, admiring Tyne's flowers, and what could be seen of the prospect from the window. I thought perhaps, after a while, we might have a reminder of cigar smoke, though nothing had been said about it in the agreement, but I sniffed in vain. The pervading odour of cheroots in the house—the one luxury my father allowed himself after the bank failure—had not encouraged him to

try one on his own account without permission. Another instance, I thought, of diffidence which most men would have thought ridiculous.

We saw scarcely anything more of him that night. When the supper-bell rang, he merely came in to say good night, and ask to be shown to his room. And then he shook hands with me, and looked me straight in the face, and said,

“Thank you, Miss Leslie, for my little room and the flowers; they were like a welcome to me.”

How I did wish then that I had put them there myself! I was quite vexed to have to tell him, alike in the interests of truth and honour, that a young friend of mine had arranged them for me.

“Whoever did it has been very kind; and I feel as if I had come *home* to-night.”

He said it very shyly, almost as a child who looks up into your face for its first

kiss, and half fears a repulse. There was a light of brotherly kindness in his eyes, which made me feel that we were no more strangers. And how the Northumbrian accent, more strongly marked now than in his sermon, brought Rae Morrison back to me.

For that, even if for nothing else, I felt that I could always be a friend to John Elphinston.

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT morning—Sunday—Tyne came in very soon after breakfast.

“I know he’s out,” she said, “for I saw him poking about in one of the rock pools. I went close by without his ever seeing me, and I could have pushed him in without his knowing who had done it. Only I thought he had had enough of that sort of thing already, and he could not very well have preached in Joe Rollekins’s blue jersey. Aunt Dora, did he say anything about the flowers?”

I told her about the pretty little speech in which he had thanked me for them, saying they had been like a welcome to

him; and I had to tell her I had felt rather sorry they had not been of my putting.

A bright, coquettish smile flashed over Tyne's face.

"I should like to put some there always for him, and not let him know anything about it. Is he nice? Do you like him?"

"Yes, indeed. I wonder who would not like him! We feel already as if he quite belonged to us. And he seems as much at home as if he had been here ever so long. He was so pleased with the little room. It quite repaid me for all the trouble. I do think he is the best person—I mean, you know, outside of our own friends—that I have seen in Cove Rossington for a long, long time."

I might have said for thirteen years, but that would have conveyed no meaning to Tyne. She gave herself a little twist, and replied, indifferently,

"I don't think you need go into raptures

over him, just because he happened to say he was comfortable. I don't know who wouldn't be comfortable in that dear little room."

"Yes; but many people wouldn't have said they were comfortable. They would just have taken it as their right that they ought to be so."

I think perhaps I made this remark as a little bit of a hit at Tyne, who had such an unconscious way of taking happiness as if it belonged to her by right. She knew a great deal more about the world than I did, was more at home in it, was much less ready to be pleased and grateful for any attention offered to her. What to me was a great favour, was to her simply what her youth and fairness commanded. I don't think, however, that she saw any meaning in my words. She only said, in the same careless, half defiant manner,

"Well, I know if I had taken half so

much trouble to make him comfortable, I should expect him to say thank you to me for it. And if he didn't, I should very soon give over doing anything for him."

"Should you? And yet you said just now that you should like always to keep fresh flowers in his room, without his knowing who put them there."

Tyne shrugged her shoulders.

"That's quite a different thing altogether. One would do it for the sake of the fun and the mystery. And then of course he must be nice if he cares for flowers at all. But, dear me! how flattered he would be if he knew how much we were talking about him! Do let us remember for a little while that he is not the only person in the world. I must be off, or I shall be late at the Sunday-school; but remember, auntie, I shall come in the middle of the week and put some fresh flowers in that little room. And if I find that you

have put any in I shall turn them all out."

And away went Tyne, half running, half skipping, like a goat, from side to side of the steep little bit of footpath which led from our house down to the room where the Sunday-school was held.

How much, after all, spite of her proud, tossy ways, the girl cared for what other people thought of her! She had come all the way up that steep hill just to ask me whether any notice had been taken of her flowers, and yet, if she had waited an hour and a half, she might have seen me at church, and asked me there. Tyne was a bundle of contradictions. Careless when cared for, anxious when neglected, eager for the good opinion of those she loved, yet making believe to fling it away like a thing of no value when given,—she would most likely have some sad slips and stumbles before she found shelter at last in the haven of some good man's love. She

could do almost anything she liked with other people, but excepting her mother and myself, she had come under scarcely any influence yet ; and I think there was something about her which made her ashamed of owning obedience to anybody. Still, for her years, she had plenty of common sense and discretion, and could hold herself, when needful, with the dignity and gravity of an upgrown woman.

I never had need to regret the chain of apparent chance or accident which brought John Elphinston to our house. I soon got over the fear of what people would say about it, and then it became a real pleasure to have him with us. There was difference enough in our years for us to fall quite naturally and easily into our proper places. He was to me as a younger brother, for whose comfort I was responsible, and he treated me with a sort of respectful consideration which at first was rather

puzzling, for I had not until then quite realised my age, nor thought of myself as a person to be deferred to on that account. I am not sure whether the flattery which my self-esteem received from this deference was not a little spoiled by the feeling it gave me of middle age; but the middle age itself was a fact which I must sooner or later accept, and the more cheerfully I accepted it the better.

Soon we learned to know each other very well. He had not had much sympathy hitherto in any way, nor much of the companionship of refined, educated women; and in proportion to his silence in general society was the perfect unreserve with which he would talk to us when we were alone. That first Saturday evening was the beginning of a new, pleasant life for us all. He still kept very much to himself, not assuming any more than he did at the outset, that his company, when

he chose to afford it, would be an honour to us. At breakfast and dinner he usually left us as soon as the meal was finished. Sometimes during tea he got into conversation with my father, and then they would talk on and on, neither of them seeming to know how the time went.

If it had been an education to me years ago to hear my father talk to the musty old professors of chemistry and mathematics, it was not less so to hear him and John Elphinston discuss the deeper, more wonderful problems of human life, social economy, and politics. I think Mr. Elphinston's experience, born not of books, but of actual contact with men and circumstances, had a great charm for my father. It supplied a lack in his own habit of mind which had been formed a little too much apart from the world. Where my father had sat still and thought, Mr. Elphinston had gone out and worked. What one had

learned in theory, the other had reduced to practice.

He told us, little by little, a good deal of his own history, or rather, it came out incidentally in the course of conversation, for he was a man who spoke not much of himself, except to explain something else which he was talking about at the time. We found that he belonged to Bonnermouth, which accounted for the Northumbrian accent. He was intended for the shipping trade, and had been placed, when he left school, with a merchant; but as he grew up, he felt that he had power to say and do things which a life wholly devoted to business would leave him little leisure to do and say, and he wanted to be a clergyman. That seemed to be the way in which he could best express himself to the world.

There were money difficulties in the way, however. His father was dead. His

mother could not spare anything from her narrow income to place him at college, and he had no rich relations who could come forward to his help. So he determined to remain in the merchant's office until he had earned enough to pay his own way through St. Bee's. He had saved about half the money, when a gentleman at Bonnermouth, happening to be present at some private literary society before which he was reading a paper, sought him out, made his acquaintance, and provided funds for him to go at once to college. It was chiefly through the influence of this friend that, when his studies were over, he was ordained to a curacy in the Midland counties, where he had been for two or three years ; when, accidentally seeing in some church paper an advertisement for a curate at Cove Rossington, he had put himself in communication with Mr. Dewtrie, and come to the place. Whilst he was

living in Staffordshire his mother had died, so that he was now quite alone in the world, with a very little income, and no prospect of patronage, except such as his own talents might procure for him.

I was better able now to understand that knowledge of the world, that evident acquaintance with the ways of thought of the working men, which had struck me so much in his sermons, and which was even more noticeable in the influence which he began to gain over the lower-class population of the parish. I think his years of apprenticeship amongst docks and shipping and commerce at Bonnermouth, had been worth quite as much to him as his college course at St. Bee's. They had given him an insight into human nature, a power of penetrating its needs, and meeting them, which whole libraries of patristic literature and theological subtleties would have failed to teach. Looking

at the work he did, the influence he exerted, I began to doubt whether in these days any education is so good for a teacher of religion and morals as actual, hard contact with the world. It seems to supply the missing link between the teacher and the taught. Men listen with interest to one who has fought with their own difficulties, and grappled with their own temptations, and teaches them the use of weapons whose temper he has himself proved in many a battle, when they turn with contemptuous indifference from the man who can only talk to them about the abstractions of theological science, or prove to them, by scholastic logic, the articles of a creed which has no longer any interest for them.

Mr. Elphinston had a wonderful way of adapting himself to different mental atmospheres, provided always that the one element of earnestness was there. I sup-

pose his great power of sympathy, arising out of unselfishness and benevolence, produced this. He could walk side by side with my father over the rough paths of theory and speculation, or, with equal ease, take Joe Rollekins's standing-place and look with that old man's keen, practical humour over the broad world of everyday life; whilst as for myself, I used to talk to him sometimes about my hopes and fears and doubts as I had never yet talked even to the dearest of my women friends. There seemed a curious magnetism of brotherhood between him and everyone who was living an honest, truthful, earnest life; a brotherhood which did not seek for its like in great gifts or shining, intellectual powers, but only felt out for simplicity and intensity of purpose, and finding this, clasped hands as with its own.

CHAPTER VII.

HE had been with us more than three weeks before Tyne met him at our house. Not that she did not wish to see him, for I believe she often came in for that very purpose ; but somehow her courage always seemed to fail, she would remember something that she had to do at home, and dash off with a singular mixture of relief and vexation, as Mercy and the urn announced the imminence of Mr. Elphinston's approach.

The meeting took place at last, in as awkward and uncomfortable a fashion as could be. We were rather late with tea.

Mr. Elphinston had come in at the usual time, and seeing that the meal was not ready, had betaken himself to a seat behind the window-curtains, where he was watching the fishermen dragging in their boats from the afternoon haul, when Tyne, boiling over with fifty times her usual animation and impetuosity, burst open the door and came rushing up to me.

She had some cause for it. She had been asked to sing at an amateur concert; and what young girl with a nice voice and a handsome face, and that careless self-confidence which is always supreme amongst indifferent people, would not rejoice at such an opportunity of shining on the boards of a concert-room? I don't blame her for it, especially as she was to have a new dress for the occasion.

"What do you think, Auntie Dora? They've asked me to sing, and mamma says I may if I like. It will be ever such

fun, for I never feel a bit frightened amongst a lot of strangers. Mr. Ullathorne will sing, and we are to make our appearance in a duet. And I believe Birdie is to twitter something too. And you are to go to Bonnermouth with me, to help me to choose a dress; you always seem to know about colours and that sort of thing, though you look like a Sister of Mercy yourself, in your everlasting browns and greys."

"Tyne, I won't have my neutral tints maligned. Middle distances and middle life demand subdued colours."

"And nobody wants to malign them, bless her dear old face!" And Tyne gave me one of her enthusiastic hugs, which used to discompose my collar and bows so dreadfully. I always had to go to the mirror and do myself up after being kissed by that girl. And then she flung down a bundle of two-part songs on the table.

"I want you to look them all over with me to-night, and choose out a pretty one for a lady and gentleman, and then play the accompaniment for me. But you have got three cups and saucers on the tray; somebody's coming to tea. Oh! I remember—it is that bothering curate. What a nuisance! He is always in the way when one wants to get a little quiet talk with you."

"That bothering curate" was obliged to come out from behind the curtains now, and be presented in due form. I was very sorry for him. The dilemma in Joe Rollekins' cottage was nothing to it. He blushed painfully. I never saw a man who was such an adept in blushing. Tyne looked for a moment angrily indignant, then tossed back her head and tried to laugh it off.

"I did not mean it, Mr. Elphinston. I

am very sorry. But I always say just what I think to Aunt Dora."

And then, suddenly becoming conscious that this explanation did not by any means mend the matter, Tyne blushed as scarlet as Mr. Elphinston.

"I mean, you know—at least, I wanted very much to have Miss Leslie quite to myself; but I suppose you heard what we were saying if you were standing in the window all the time. I am very sorry I said anything about you."

Mercy, true to her name, came in just then, and turned the tide a little. I rattled the cups and saucers as vigorously as ever Mrs. Rollekins had done on that momentous Monday evening. I inquired after Mrs. Wear's health as if I had not seen or heard of her for years. I took infinite pains to get everybody comfortably seated at the table; and by-and-by, to my great delight, the cloud cleared away from

Tyne's brow, and she shone out again, brightly as a girl of twenty always should.

Mr. Elphinston did not get over the difficulty so easily. He had a dreadfully small share of tact and self-possession in these little awkwardnesses. He could not recover himself at all. Tyne, conscious that she had hurt him very much, but not yet caring for him enough to be troubled by that consciousness, did her best to make things straight again. She tried to get him into conversation. He answered shyly, and let the subject drop. She told me funny stories, glancing covertly at him to see if he appeared amused by them. He smiled, but with quite a surface enjoyment of the joke. At last, not without a little touch of temper, she left him entirely to himself, and began to talk to me about the concert, taking no further notice of him.

He kept looking at the clock. For politeness sake I made spasmodic remarks

to him now and then, but nothing that was started seemed to go comfortably. We wanted Mrs. Ullathorne to put a little oil on the wheels. However aggravating she might be sometimes, she was undeniably useful when the machine of social intercourse got out of order. It was a relief to us all when a general silence announced the conclusion of tea, and Mr. Elphinston, slipping quietly out of his place, begged to be excused.

“And that is what you call such a *very* pleasant man,” said Tyne, when he was out of the room. “He can’t hear me *now*, I suppose. Well, I think he is very stupid—that is just what I think he is. Mamma said he was very clever, but did not shine in general society. I think she might have put it a little more strongly. How do you get on with him?”

“Very well indeed. But you must remember that even the most humble men

don't like to be called 'bothering curates.' Human nature goes against it."

"Then they shouldn't stand behind window curtains when people don't know anything about them. Or else the curtains should be poor enough to let them show through. He is what I call a regular stupid. He makes you feel that you can't do anything to amuse him. *Didn't* I try to set things going smoothly again? I do dislike a man who makes you feel that you can't do anything."

"You mean, Tyne, you dislike a man who makes you feel that you have no power over him."

"No, Aunt Dora, it isn't that. I know you think I wanted to flirt with him."

"No. I don't think anything of the kind. But you like to feel you can make a difference."

Tyne opened wide her great innocent eyes.

"Well, of course, I should think I do. I wonder who doesn't like to feel like that? Why, you might as well be nobody at all, if you can't even make a difference. I never tried so much in my life to make things straight, and look—he asks to be excused. Yes, Mr. Elphinston, we are very glad to excuse you."

And Tyne began to rake up her music with a dissatisfied air.

"I think I shall go home."

"And how about the duets?"

"Oh, bother the duets! That man has taken all the song out of me. Fancy smiling, and putting on a nice expression, suitable to the music, when you have been behaved to as if you were a piece of wood. Just as if I had really meant to be rude to him."

"Tyne, you misunderstand him. He is not vexed, only he had not self-possession enough to get over the little awkwardness

properly. I daresay you have spoiled an evening's study for him."

"Well, then, I *have* made a difference, and that is just what I wanted to do," said the wilful girl. "If one can't please a man, the next best thing is to displease him. I like to know that I am doing something."

And Tyne walked off. But I knew well enough that Mr. Elphinston must have made a considerable difference to *her*, or she would never have given up the practice of those duets, and the long talks with me about the new dress.

Next morning she came with a lovely bunch of primroses and ivy, and being quite sure that Mr. Elphinston was out visiting in the parish, she arranged the flowers on the brackets in his little room. She did not do it with any careless indifference this time either, but took them out and put them in again, time after time, until she could be quite satisfied with them.

And then she looked at them for a long time.

“They are not so pretty as they might be, after all,” she said. “And don’t say that I put them there. But you can tell him I am very sorry for having vexed him last night.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. WEAR took me to the concert. Tyne looked as bright and bonnie as any girl could look, in her dress of fresh white muslin with dashes of rose colour here and there, and green leaves in her wavy, light brown hair. Mr. Ullathorne, who was the appointed Edwin to her Angelina in a rapturously sentimental duet, appeared to be in a jubilant state of satisfaction, both with himself and his partner.

I could not understand why Ted Ullathorne was perpetually going to Oxford, but never went; for he could not at this time have been less than two-and-twenty, and everybody knew that he was intended

for the Church. Perhaps he thought the best way of preparing for this sacred office was by studying human nature as it manifested itself at a fashionable watering-place like Cove Rossington. Because, if five years of going in and out amongst sailors, and shipping, and commerce, and two years' experience amongst the colliers of the Midland counties, had given Mr. Elphinston such influence over men of that class, why should not a similar course of going in and out amongst elegant ladies and empty-headed young men give Ted Ullathorne an insight into that particular class of human nature? And as women are more abundant than men, ought they not to be studied more carefully, in order the better to meet their needs? No one can find fault with such logic, and I think it suited Ted very well. I am sure, to see him step through the intricacies of a quadrille, or hand a lady in and out of a room,

one would think he could not be better employed.

Birdie, too, a vaporous mass of blue tulle, warbled in a thin soprano voice something very pretty about airy, fairy Lilian. Everybody said the song must have been made for her. I am sure she thought it was, for she sang it with such a coy, apologetic consciousness of her own giddy bewitching little self. How could she help being so pretty, and so giddy, and so foolish, and making everyone fall in love with her merry ways? That was just what Birdie's blue eyes said as they were sometimes raised, sometimes archly veiled, and sometimes shyly cast down during her personification of Tennyson's mischievous little sprite of a Lilian. We could have imagined a likeness more complete than that of the flirt of six-and-twenty, but still it passed muster very well.

Tyne had another song in the second

part of the concert. She did not sing it with half the spirit and *abandon* of the first. I thought she was tired or vexed about something, until, happening to look round, I saw Mr. Elphinston in the side seats. That was quite enough to account for Tyne's loss of self-possession. She was beginning to care very much for what he thought about her, though she pretended to be utterly indifferent; and the feeling of his presence made a sort of opposing current, through which she could not flash out, as before, saucy, self-reliant, and confident.

We all got mixed up together in the ante-room coming out. Mrs. Ullathorne had got possession of the new curate, and put Birdie into his hands to be wrapped up in blue cashmere and swansdown, previous to being led to her carriage. Birdie seemed to like wrapping up very well, judging by the number of times she made Mr. Elphinston take the cloak off and put it on again, before

it fitted comfortably, Tyne meanwhile, who was being wrapped up by Ted Ullathorne, looking disdainfully upon the two, and scarcely condescending a word of thanks to her cavalier as he packed her snugly away by her mother's side. Either she really was vexed about something, or she was doing it just out of coquetry. Mrs. Ullathorne beamed upon both the young couples with equal complacency. I believe nothing would have given her more satisfaction than to have seen Ted and bright pretty Eglantine Wear launched into the solemnities of an actual engagement; and I for my part can honestly say that nothing would have given me less, except perhaps that John Elphinston and the mass of blue tulle should get entangled together.

Poor Tyne! She gave a great sigh as the carriage rolled away, and scarcely spoke to us all the way home, after she had said she should never care to go to a

concert again. She gave me an impetuous kiss when I was turned out at my own door. Her cheeks were hot and her hands were cold, and I believe she was altogether very uncomfortable.

I had my fears sometimes for that girl's happiness. I knew her wilful, petulant ways covered a heart with such a passionate power of loving and suffering. I did not blame her, nobody could, for having smiled so brightly upon Ted Ullathorne during the singing of that duet, nor for having accepted with such careless pleasure his flattering attentions during the concert. A handsome girl of twenty cannot be expected to clothe herself in a chain mail of reserve, measure out every glance, smile, gesture, in order that the people upon whom they are bestowed may not be too dangerously impressed by them. Tyne did not behave in that bright, fascinating, coquettish way to bring men to her feet.

It was just her natural manner when she felt perfectly at ease. The consciousness that she was pleasing gave brilliance to her manners. She liked, as she said, to feel that she was making a difference.

Only the worst of it was that, where she made it, she did not care for it, and where she failed to make it, she became wayward and discontented, and showed entirely an unnatural side of herself to those whose favour she wished to gain. I don't wonder at people calling Tyne a flirt, though I, who knew her through and through, was sure that she had not a bit of it in her disposition. Still I did wish she would not be quite so bright with those whom she cared nothing at all for, nor quite so moody with those under whose stronger, higher influence she was coming.

Tyne did not need to go to Bonnermouth any more to receive and decline the offers which some girls count up as a

soldier his medals. Cove Rossington had turned over entirely a new leaf in the matter of its male population, or John Elphinston would never have looked down upon such an assemblage of beards as showed itself in our parish church after he had been preaching there for a few weeks. Things were wonderfully changed since the days of my girlhood, when about a dozen households, consisting chiefly of aged officers, widows, and maiden ladies, constituted the respectability of the place. We counted our villas now by the hundred, grand, pretentious new places, with magnificent fronts, and nothing to speak of behind. All around us, even for miles out of the town, streets were planned and surveyed, with perhaps one house or two standing in them, like people who had come to church half an hour before the time, and were waiting for the rest of the congregation to appear. Our dear old

thatched cottages were nearly all swept away now, because, as the original residents died out, they were pulled down to make room for handsomer, more expensive lodges and villas, until our house and Miss Fidger's, and Mrs. Wear's, and one occupied by the widow of the former agent, were almost the only remains of the ancient village; Mrs. Wear and Tyne being a sort of connecting link for us between the old time and the new.

But how different Tyne's girlhood from mine, when Cove Rossington was in its simplicity, and Aunt Lois's ways were those of every well-regulated household. I used to smile to myself sometimes, as I saw her dressed for some fashionable evening party in all the glories of lace and tulle and muslin, and remembered my own brown merino girlhood, unrelieved by anything prettier than a cambric frill, until that talent for etching, which now went to-

wards paying for soap and candles, enabled me to buy a bit of blue ribbon to heighten the fairness of a neck as white and round then as Tyne's was now.

And yet, as I said to myself, what difference did it make? I had had my day; a short one it is true, but still very happy. Even if I had blossomed out ever so brightly into rose colour and muslin, the small-pox would have brought everything down to the same level. And when once an impassable barrier has been raised between ourselves and the pleasant past, perhaps it is better one should remember the brown merinos on the other side of it, more than the rose colour and glow which can never, never come again.

CHAPTER IX.

AS I said before, there began to be a wonderful change in our parish church when John Elphinston had preached in it a few Sundays. Coal and iron had brought beards enough to our once quiet little fishing village, but coal and iron never made them come to church until the new curate began to fling out his arrows of rebuke and sarcasm at them there.

I don't know whether ordinary men and women really like to have their pretences and hollownesses pointed out to them, but certainly they gather in great force to listen to a man who can tear from them the garment of what they have been

accustomed to call their profession, and rend it asunder and fling it in rags and ribbons to the four winds of heaven. I suppose they comfort themselves, as I did the first time I heard Mr. Elphinston, by taking for granted that the rags and ribbons which are left scattering about the church belong to their neighbours; and so they go home feeling quite warm and decent, when, if they could see themselves as others see them, they have scarcely a rag to cover them. At any rate, Mrs. Ullathorne, than whom a more irreligious woman, using that word in its honest, legitimate sense, never stepped, used to listen to John Elphinston with rapt attention, and express her surprise that the whole character of the place was not transformed by so vigorous and earnest a ministry. I wonder if she ever thought she needed changing herself.

Mrs. Ullathorne had dropped me almost

entirely since that conversation about the fishes and lumps of coal. Indeed, when I considered the regularity with which she now attended the outward means, and brought Birdie with her too, that sweet young creature fluttering to prayers every morning when there were any, as gaily as she fluttered in the afternoon to the circulating library for a new novel, I could but own that I was no fit companion for her. But perhaps the residence of a clergyman under our own roof, and that clergyman one whom Lord Rossington himself came regularly now to hear, and who might therefore be considered as in the royal road to promotion, turned her attention towards me again, and made her re-consider the "poor thing" sort of pity which she had expressed for me to Mrs. Wear when she heard that we had been reduced to taking in a gentleman to board with us.

For, when Mr. Elphinston had been with us about a couple of months, she and Birdie came to call upon me.

I don't know how it was, but I could not help being polite to her. No one could. She was so pleasant and affable. Almost I thought it could only have been a dream that I had sat behind her at that astronomical lecture, and heard myself, in such sweet and mellifluous accents, relegated to the dangerous classes. And, as if she felt that I might perhaps have a little lurking grudge against her, she brought me a basket of strawberries from her own garden, and Birdie had laid upon the top of them a bouquet of lovely geraniums.

"I thought we must bring you a peace-offering," she said, pressing the basket into my somewhat reluctant hands, "or you would not even look at us again, when we have behaved so naughtily in not coming

to see you such a long time. It has really been quite a trouble to me that I have seen so little of you lately, but you don't know how hard it is to keep up one's acquaintance when fresh people are continually calling. I tell Birdie it is all her fault; she ought not to make herself so popular with everybody. I have said over and over again that I really would come, but something has always prevented me, and now I am quite ashamed of showing myself."

"Oh, please don't make any apologies," I said. "I am quite sure you would have come if it had been convenient."

Which was vastly true.

"Yes, I am sure I would," said Mrs. Ullathorne, taking my remark in its general meaning, "only I am positively so crushed with engagements that I am often obliged to appear rude to my dearest friends. But I hope you will forgive me, and let

our pleasant little friendship be taken up again. Do come some evening, now. We will have mid-day dinner on purpose that you may have a nice quiet six-o'clock tea with us."

When people have mid-day dinners on purpose to condescend to your old-fashioned, primitive habits, what can you do? Common politeness forbade me to say anything but that I should be most happy. I am afraid, if politeness had not forbade it, that dreadful feeling I always had of not being able to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to Mrs. Ullathorne, would.

"Ah! now that is so kind of you. And if Mr. Elphinston cares to come too, we should be very delighted to see him. Not, of course, that we can offer any companionship to such a talented man, but perhaps he might enjoy a little music, after the severer labours of the day, and Birdie has

been getting some of the loveliest ballads lately. Have you not, Birdie dear?"

"Yes, ma, dear," chirped the little maiden, "only you don't suppose Mr. Elphinston would ever care for anything so foolish as my singing. What *do* you talk to him about, Miss Leslie? Do you know, I should be so dreadfully afraid of such a clever man."

"Oh! we talk about the price of beef and mutton," I said, coolly, for Birdie's affected childishness exasperated me more than even her mother's urbanity; "and sometimes we soar into the region of puddings, and I ask him whether he likes them made of suet. I assure you we are never at a loss for conversation. When everything else fails, we make a calculation as to how long a penny mould candle will burn, and whether they are not in the end cheaper than dips. So you see there are plenty of subjects on which we can sympathise."

"Dear me," said Birdie, "how *very* curious! Are you quite sure you are not making fun of me? Because, you know, I am so stupid. I am never sure when people are making fun of me. And will you *really* bring him to see us? It will be so delightful, if only I am not too much afraid."

"Such a silly little thing, is she not?" said Mrs. Ullathorne, complacently. "I tell her she never ought to have come out of pinafores and short frocks; but you know, Miss Leslie, we cannot *all* have great intellectual capabilities. Some people must set the buttons on and make the puddings."

"And talk the nonsense," I added, mentally. And if Mrs. Ullathorne was talking "at" me, and inferring that my buttons and puddings were not properly attended to because I was able to be a companion to my father, I could have told her that she was very much mistaken. But I could not

be so rude as even to think anything of the sort, because she had come on purpose to take me into the arms of her friendship again. Perhaps she had found out, after all, that she was mistaken, that my opinions were not so very dangerous, and was making amends for having misjudged me.

And the remarks which she made to me as we were walking down our garden-path—for she had suggested that a little turn in the sun would do me good—convinced me that she must really, after all, have a sincere esteem for me; that is, supposing Mrs. Ullathorne could be sincere about anything.

“I should be so glad, you know,” she said, confidentially, as Birdie was hopping about, and going into raptures over the loveliness of the cabbage-beds—“I should be so glad, so *grateful* to you, dear Miss Leslie, if you would sometimes take a little

notice of my pet. I know you think her a thoughtless, frivolous little thing, and so, of course, she is, compared with yourself; but I do assure you it is only on the surface. She has really very good intentions, and I believe your serious influence would do her so much good just now."

That settled it. Mrs. Ullathorne *had* been mistaken. I wished I dare ask her to tell Mr. Collinson so, but I thought I had better not say anything about it. I only said that I should be very pleased to see Birdie now and then, though I was afraid she would find our house very dull; though, if she came to talk to me, the quieter we were the better. Would she come in the next evening, when I should be quite alone, Mr. Elphinston having an engagement in the town?

Mrs. Ullathorne was so sorry, but she fancied some one was coming next evening, and people were always so disappoint-

ed if Birdie was not at home. But any other evening.

“The evening after, dear Miss Leslie, if that would suit you. It will be such a pleasure to me to feel that you take a little interest in her. She was dreadfully afraid of you at first, because she had heard you were so very superior; and she is such a timid thing. But I told her I was quite sure you only needed to be known to be loved.”

Every woman likes to have such a thing as that said to her; and on the strength of it Birdie Ullathorne was invited to come and have tea with me on the next evening but one.

CHAPTER X.

SHE came very early, that being part of the arrangement, that she might have a quiet time with me before tea, when Mr. Elphinston would most probably make his appearance.

She looked fashionable enough in our quaint old sitting-room, though I think she had tried to dress herself rather simply, as became a girl who wished to be seriously influenced by a very sober, unworldly person. She dropped down at once on a foot-stool at my knee, and looked up at me as if she was quite ready for me to begin at any time.

It made me feel very much as if I were

acting in a charade ; because to talk about anything beyond surface matters requires one to be in a certain sympathetic mood, and I was in no mood at all, except that of seeing the ludicrous side of the situation. I had not even the satisfaction of feeling that Birdie was in earnest, which would have given me just enough interest to talk myself out a little to her. There was something so premeditated about the whole thing.

Still more I felt like acting a charade when, finding that I spoke about nothing more serious at first than the weather and the pretty pattern of the case in which she had brought her crochet-work, she looked up appealingly into my face, and began to put me through a series of questions, something like those in manuals for self-examination. Did I not find it very hard to be good ? Wasn't it a dreadfully difficult thing to keep one's thoughts right ?

Did I think it proper to go to parties during Lent? And when I gave what I considered moderately lenient answers, so as not to make the path of rectitude quite

"Too high
For sinful man below the sky,"

she would clasp her hands and say,

"Oh, Miss Leslie, you are *so* good. I do wonder how ever you came to be so good. Do tell me a great deal about yourself. I am so dreadfully sorry I did not begin to know you a great while ago. Only, you know, I thought you never could have patience to talk to a stupid little thing like me."

The unreality of it all became more and more curious to me. I felt as if I were putting on a part—making myself appear quite a different person. I think you must be conscious of a certain sort of sympathy, however slight, between yourself and your companion, before you can speak what is

absolutely true to your own deepest feelings, about anything. Birdie kept me talking to her in that artificial way for fully half an hour, during the whole of which time I had the strangest sense of appearing to her quite unlike what I knew myself to be. My own thoughts, so far as I could find words for them at all, were, in a sense, truly expressed; but the medium which her essentially different nature created between us distorted them so that I knew they must appear to her as different as possible from what they were when they left my own mind.

Having this feeling now for the first time, I wondered whether Mr Elphinston, whether teachers of religion generally (for of course, during that half-hour, I was a sort of one)—had the same feeling when preaching to their congregations. Because, in nine cases out of ten, the congregation of a very earnest, thoughtful man

is as entirely out of sympathy with himself as Birdie was out of sympathy with me ; and the medium which this want of sympathy produces, so distorts objects which pass through it—or rather, I should say, ideas,—that they appear to the receiver in an entirely different form from that in which they left their originator's mind. Perhaps it would be rather an interesting sight for a man to look upon his own thoughts in the shape which they present after having passed through this distorting medium.

The entrance of Mr. Elphinston interrupted—pleasantly, I think, for both of us—this course of serious conversation. I had asked him to come in when his afternoon work of visiting was over, or the presence of a guest would most likely have driven him to his own room for the rest of the evening. I thought he seemed more tired than usual. Most likely he had

found some painful case of distress in the parish. There were plenty of them now, goodness knows!—and of a kind, too, that neither coal nor flannel petticoats could in any wise help away; cases of downright, hard-hearted cruelty from husband to wife, or parent to child, or grown-up son to aged, dependent mother; things that made one's blood boil with indignation simply to hear of them. How much more, then, to see them, as he did from day to day, and feel himself powerless to help!

For he was a man whose sympathy was always ready for real distress; and since he had always accustomed himself to act upon this sympathy—to direct it into some available channel, instead of letting it spend itself merely in kind words,—it had become mighty within him, so mighty that, when it could find no way to turn itself into action, it tortured him by its very strength, and gave him no rest. It was

doing so now. He had the look of a man who finds himself helpless in the presence of some great wrong—who is cast down, overborne by evil which he has no power to cure.

Birdie seemed to have had enough of me after Mr. Elphinston came in, or perhaps she thought that he required the comfort which a simple, artless young creature like herself was so well calculated to give. She applied herself at once to the gentle care of amusing him, not with quite so much success, I must say, as when, a few months before, she had taken Mr. Jennet in hand for the same purpose. Birdie was too intent on what I afterwards found was her chief object in life—the securing of an establishment—to perceive that there are times when a man wishes to be let alone, either to tide over the reaction which some unusual demand upon his sympathy has produced, or that he may

ponder some great earnest question—some new problem in the experience of life. She had not her mother's tact to see into passing moods of feeling, and adjust herself to them, even if she could not comprehend them. She did her pretty little bits of gushing, asked childish questions, alternately clapped or clasped her hands, as delight or astonishment appeared the most suitable *rôle* to adopt, and looked up into Mr. Elphinston's face from time to time with an expression of appealing ignorance which ought certainly to have softened the heart of any man who likes to feel that he is a superior being.

It was all to no purpose. I think, if he had not come in by my own invitation, he would have asked to be excused before he had had half an hour of Birdie's performances. I was sure that something more than mere tiredness was making him so quiet. There was such a look of failure

and disappointment in his face. He must have been vexed about something ; but I never asked Mr. Elphinston any questions. It was not my place, as simply a household friend, to pry into his annoyances. If he told me of his affairs, I was always ready to be interested in them ; and he knew me well enough to be sure that my silence never arose from want of heart, or even want of thought.

I did wish want of either one or the other would have caused Birdie to be silent ; but no, she went chattering on like a bubbling, babbling brook, and my little hints from time to time about Mr. Elphinston's tiredness produced not the least effect. I was very glad when, towards the middle of the evening, Tyne came in. I had not asked her, for she and Birdie had nothing in common ; and still less, I dare say, would she have troubled us with her company, if she had known that Mr. El-

phinston was with us. She soon took in the state of affairs. She saw his tired, spiritless look, Birdie's unavailing attempts at fascination, my annoyance with the girl's nonsense and folly, the cross-current of influences which was at work amongst us all. That gave her manner a sort of quiet seriousness. I should not have known Tyne that night for the wilful, petulant creature who had fretted and pouted so a little while before over her powerlessness to make "a difference" to somebody who, I think, was already beginning, from some reason or other, to make a very considerable difference to her.

I set Birdie to sing. I wonder I had not thought of it before, but sometimes people never do think of the right thing in the right place.

"Oh, so glad!" she said, skipping to the piano, and dabbling about amongst my

loose music for something that would suit her voice. "But I am afraid I shan't find anything that I can sing. You know, Miss Leslie, intellectual people like yourself always have contralto voices, and I am too stupid for anything but a soprano. Isn't it dreadful to be so stupid?"

"Then sing something from memory, can't you?" said Tyne, abruptly.

"Oh, dear, no. I positively can't sing a note without my music; you know, my master never would let me do it, for he said it got me into such a careless way, he was always scolding me for carelessness. I think I might just remember one of those simple little ballads, though, if they wouldn't be too foolish for you. Should you mind a ballad, Mr. Elphinston? Would it bore you very much?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Elphinston. "Pray sing anything that you can remember."

Birdie began, "Airy, fairy Lilian," but fortunately stopped in the middle of the first verse, having forgotten the words. I don't think we could any of us have borne her rendering of it just then.

"Oh! what a pity!" she said, clasping her hands in pretty confusion, "do forgive me for making such a simpleton of myself. But, you know," she added, archly, turning to Mr. Elphinston, "I *can* sing it when I have the music. People said it was very nice at the amateur concert, and they used to tease me for it dreadfully after that for a long time. I'll try something else, only don't be vexed with me if I forget again."

And then she gave us a typical drawing-room ballad, full of the usual assertions about hearts, and moonlight, and dew, each verse ending with a passionate longing for some one to pet and love her, some one on whom she could pour out her pent-up wealth of affection. A perfectly natu-

ral and holy and beautiful longing for every young girl in the world to possess, only common sense seemed to dictate the propriety of allowing it to remain unexpressed—at least, in public.

I applauded mildly when it was over. Mr. Elphinston said nothing but “Please go on,” grateful, no doubt, for the opportunity of being quiet a little while. But Birdie protested that she could not remember a single note of anything else, and coming back to us, knelt on the hearth-rug, very near Mr. Elphinston’s toes, and under pretence of warming her hands, stayed there for a full quarter of an hour, teasing the poor man with her incessant patter patter of simplicity.

It was rather dark, but I would not have the lamp lighted. I could at least give him the repose of twilight, if I could give him the repose of nothing else. Tyne had been sitting still for a long time, taking no

part in the conversation; only I could see her great searching eyes wandering over John Elphinston's face, and I knew that not a change of it, not one weary gesture, nor tired, hopeless sigh, had escaped her notice. At last, without speaking a word to any of us, she rose, and feeling her way to the piano in the half-dark, began to sing Mendelssohn's aria, "Oh! rest in the Lord."

What a way that girl had sometimes of finding out just what people wanted, and giving it to them! Her intense pride and shyness where she was really interested kept her from speaking a single word on her own account; but, whilst folded up in her mantle of almost defiant maiden reserve, she could yet drop the sweetest gifts of sympathy where she saw they were needed. She had found out John Elphinston's sadness, but, too proud to own her pity by word or look, she just turned the

light of the musician's soul in upon his, and gave him comfort so.

It did its work. A great calm came over his face. I could see he was at peace now, and Tyne had brought it to him.

"Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him; and fret not thyself because of evil doers."

How the good words seemed to gain new meaning from the music and the voice! How the goodness and tenderness and womanly sympathy which Tyne was half ashamed of, breathed out in those rich, veiled tones of hers, and spoke for her better than anything else! What she had done was like the quiet clasp of a friend's hand coming in the darkness, and as quietly passing away.

She stood by the piano for a little while after she had finished. I think I see her now in the evening twilight. There was a sort of large majesty about her, even in

her girlishness, a feeling of something waiting for her by-and-by, which gave her, in her better moods of thought, a strange, womanly dignity.

"I shall go home now," she said. "I was not to be very late. Miss Ullathorne, shall we go together?"

She knew well enough that we wanted to be quiet. But Birdie had no intention of going before her time. I fancy she felt a little blown out by that sudden breeze from the heights of Tyne's dawning womanhood, and she wanted to recover herself.

"Thank you so much; but dear *mamma* said she would call in for me with Ted on their way from the choir practice, and she would think it so funny if I had left. You won't mind it, will you, Eglangtine dear, because I really don't mean to be rude; and, Miss Leslie, you will let me stay a little longer, will you not?"

Of course I expressed my willingness. Tyne shrugged her shoulders. She and Birdie always reminded me of a mastiff and a toy-terrier.

"Very well; only people want to be quiet sometimes, Miss Ullathorne."

"Yes," said the apparently unconscious little damsel; "and if dear Miss Leslie is the least bit tired, I will promise to sit as still as a mouse. You don't know how still I can be, Miss Leslie. Only I don't want mamma to be disappointed when she comes."

"Good night, then," said Tyne; and she shook hands with us both. "I am very sorry you are so tired," she said, very quietly, as she bade Mr. Elphinston farewell.

"I am not tired now. You have rested me very much. Thank you for what you have done for me to-night."

I think the dark helped him to say it.

Perhaps it helped Tyne, too, to say what she did. I saw again the peaceful home look in his eyes, that had been so pleasant to me when he bade me good night for the first time. And there was no longer any shyness in it. He might be beginning to find something of his own in this girl, who had only vexed him before.

Tyne flashed away from him, as if ashamed of having told so much of herself as that alto solo expressed.

"Aunt Dora, I shall come some time to-morrow to help you to stick the rods into the beans. We have a lot spared from last year, and mamma says you may as well have them. You know it is quite time they were put in now."

That was Tyne's way. She always dashed into common-place, if just for a moment anything of her real self had been allowed to shine through. And under cover of the beans she made her escape, glad enough, I daresay, to be gone.

CHAPTER XI.

I KEPT Birdie to her promise of sitting as still as a mouse, so that when Mrs. Ullathorne came in half an hour later, all smiles and animation, she must have thought us rather a sombre party, especially as my father, who might perhaps have drawn Mr. Elphinston into conversation, had betaken himself to the cliffs for a walk.

“Now, Birdie, my pet, I am sure Miss Leslie must be quite tired of you; you know she is not accustomed to such chattering little people. I hope”—and Mrs. Ullathorne beamed so pleasantly upon me

—"you have not been quite bored to death, Miss Leslie."

"On the contrary," I replied, passing judiciously over the earlier part of the evening, "we have been having a very profitable time. Miss Wear happened to come in, and preached a sermon to us on music, and you found us in the midst of the silence after the benediction."

A slight cloud passed over Mrs. Ullathorne's face. It might be she was not pleased that Tyne had come in, to interfere with our serious conversation; or perhaps she took exception to my manner of introducing what she considered sacred subjects. Mrs. Ullathorne liked religion to be confined to the pulpit. Still I had been very good. I must not be quarrelled with.

"How funny! I have heard of sermons in stones, but I did not know they were to be found in music before. I am sure, Birdie, you ought to be very much

obliged to Miss Wear. And so kind of you too, Miss Leslie, to let my pet come and spend such a long evening with you, if only she has not tired you too much. Have you, Birdie?"

"Oh! no, ma, dear. Everybody thought Mr. Elphinston looked so tired, and Miss Wear wanted to take me away with her ever so long ago; but I said I must not leave until you called for me, and so I promised not to speak a word. Now haven't I been a good little girl, Miss Leslie?"

"Very," I replied, as gravely as possible. Birdie would have liked me to pat her on the cheek, for it was turned up to me with that intent, but I did not feel that I could go so far. Mrs. Ullathorne looked tenderly towards Mr. Elphinston.

"Poor man! you have been tiring yourself amongst those wretched pit people. I am sure it is enough to wring a heart of stone

to go through some of those back streets, and see the distress. I make it a point of conscience to keep out of them as much as possible—for what can you do? But, dear me! don't let us talk about it. If you are tired, Mr. Elphinston, I am sure nothing will do you so much good as a little stroll. It is such a lovely evening, you cannot imagine anything so delicious as the lights and shadows upon the cliffs, and the air is as balmy as if we were in the middle of Summer. Birdie, dear, Miss Leslie will perhaps let you go and put your hat on."

Birdie went, and so did I, as in politeness bound; and when we came down again, there was Mr. Elphinston with his hat and stick, and a not very jubilant expression of countenance, prepared to escort the ladies home. Mrs. Ullathorne had evidently been using her time to good purpose.

"I have persuaded him, you see," she said, "to take a little turn with us. I am

sure the air will do him good. I daresay he thinks I am no end of a plague, because I would not let him sit moping in that easy chair, and I don't believe you would disabuse his mind of the prejudice; now, would you, Miss Leslie? Come, confess. Don't you think I am a plague? But then, you know, we cannot all be people of superior minds, for in that case who would talk the nonsense?"

Very true, thought I, and who would make such comfortable little arrangements for the fledglings who were fluttering on the edge of the maternal nest, ready to take flight to one of their own as soon as it was ready for them. I was beginning to feel my old dislike of Mrs. Ullathorne return in full force, as the thought suggested itself to me that her anxiety for Birdie to come to our house was more on Mr. Elphinston's account than my own. However, the end of it was that they all

went home together, which was doubtless the object she had in view in calling for Birdie herself.

“ And if I keep him for an hour or two, Miss Leslie, don’t be very angry with me, for I am sure a little cheerful society will do him no end of good. He does not get the dust rubbed off him half enough.”

And with this not very complimentary reflection on my companionable qualities, and with any number of sweet smiles from the ladies, I was left to myself.

Quite to myself, for my father was still pacing up and down on the cliffs. Most likely he was following out some train of thought which would keep him there for an hour longer. And as for Mr. Elphinston, if midnight brought him back again, I might be content.

As I sat there alone, my thoughts wandered away to Tyne. I suppose women who have not much to do, and who have

no very deep, absorbing anxieties in life, will sometimes employ themselves by building up castles in the air for those they love. I had never seen anybody that I could wish Tyne to care for, except Mr. Elphinston ; and two or three things had made me think that she was beginning to care for him a little. To-night they had come nearer to each other. He had known her for something quite different from the wilful, petulant, half developed girl which she must have seemed to him on the first night of their meeting. They had just touched hands in the dark, and passed on ; but next time they met, they would be no longer strangers. Perhaps some day they would be all the world to each other, and then the friendship which I was giving to John Elphinston, which was growing to be such a joy and comfort to me, which was putting such a light into the else grey and shadowy picture of my life, would have to

pass away, as other pleasant things had passed away before it, and my father and I would be left to ourselves again in the quiet old home, more quiet for that even this little glow of life and interest had once stirred it.

Mr. Elphinston came home sooner than I expected, having successfully resisted Mrs. Ullathorne's persuasions to stay for a little music. He told me that the chief object of the walk had been to secure his name for a charitable pic-nic which was to take place early in September, in aid of the funds for the new church at Coley-Orton. As the population of that district was very poor, the wealthy colliery people having settled nearer to Cove Rossington, they were not able to do much for themselves ; and this pic-nic had been proposed as a substitute for a bazaar. I had heard whispers about it before, but did not know that anything was finally settled. I

thought she might as well have told him of the affair in my presence, and perhaps bespoken my patronage as well. I was finding out, however, that Mrs. Ullathorne had little side springs and motives of her own in nearly everything that she did, and I held my peace.

Mr. Elphinston told me, as we sat by ourselves in the gloom of that late evening, what had disturbed him so when he came in from his round of parish visiting. He had been spending more than half an hour in the cottage of one of the miners, trying to persuade him to buy good meat for his wife and children, instead of giving it all to his bull-dogs. Such a visit, especially when all he could extort from the man was a promise to think about his starving family, was not likely to send him home with a very cheerful spirit; but that was not the end of his vexation. Not far from the miner's cottage he met Mr. Collinson, the parish

churchwarden, and Mr. Collinson had asked him to take a walk on the cliffs, for the purpose of a little serious conversation.

I thought it was rather curious that we should both have been troubled in the same direction. Mr. Elphinston however, had not come off so comfortably as myself, the conversation having taken the form, not of advice asked, but of strictures given, and the strictures were upon the nature of his pulpit ministrations.

Mr. Collinson had said he entered upon the subject with the greatest reluctance—people always do say so when they intend to make you thoroughly uncomfortable—and assured his young friend that nothing but the pleadings of his own conscience, seconded by remarks which he had heard from one or two of the leading people in the parish, would have induced him to take such a step. He was the last person in the world to enter upon anything unpleas-

ant, unless absolutely driven to it, he said, And I could believe that, though I did not yet know what the step or the unpleasantness might be, for Mr. Collinson was a peace-loving man, not at all fussy or conceited, only rather strait-laced in his opinions. He had been known to warn the poor people against Joe Rollekins as a dangerous character ; but as that happened shortly after Mrs. Ullathorne's visit to the beach cottage, I could account for it without blaming our worthy churchwarden very severely.

"He went on to tell me," Mr. Elphinston said, "that he was afraid I was departing from the simplicity of the Gospel ; that I was preaching myself instead of my Master, by flinging these new opinions amongst the people ; that I was shaking their faith, and suggesting to them the oppositions of science, falsely so called. Of course he did not say it in just so many words, but he

gave me to understand that every sermon of mine, since I came to the place, had done more harm than good, by unsettling the minds of my thoughtful hearers, making them search into truth instead of accepting it in a spirit of meekness. He told me I had better fling away my grand ideas of progress and inquiry and development, and be content to preach the Gospel."

"As if," and John Elphinston fired up as I had scarcely seen him fire up before, except in the heat of some passionate appeal to the people, "as if to teach them to live pure and honest lives, to be and not to seem, to do and not to talk, to walk humbly with their God and charitably with their fellow-men, were not the very Gospel which Christ Himself came to preach. As if teaching men to look at their duties to each other, would not establish their faith instead of unsettling it; as if true knowledge and true religion could ever fight against each other."

"Well," I said, "if Mr. Collinson's faith is of a kind that cannot stand a little fresh light upon his duty to God and his neighbour, I think the sooner it is shaken, and roughly too, the better. But you must not take him as the mouthpiece of the people. You most likely misunderstood him when you thought he said he represented the views of the better part of the congregation."

"Not I," and John Elphinston set his teeth together. "I have spoken too plainly to the rich ones amongst them. They don't like to be told that they are grinding the faces of the poor, and fattening upon vice and misery which would never have existed but for their selfishness. They would like me to give over preaching sermons, and, instead, have pretty services, with plenty of music and singing, for their wives and daughters to come to. I should be popular enough

then, and nobody would find any fault with me. But if the world can be saved by the sweet chanting of psalms ready written for us, what need for men to spend their lives in the searching out of truth, or the teaching of it? Let us build organs, and pay surpliced choirs, and then wait for the Millennium. It will come—it will surely come.”

I had never seen John Elphinston look like that before. I did not know the pleasant, genial face could harden into such sharp, sarcastic severity, or the kindly voice assume such bitter tones. No words of mine could do him any good. He had given bread to these people, and they had asked for a stone. He had offered them of his best and truest, and they were turning against him as a disturber of their false peace. To tell him that I believed in him was no new thing. What he most sadly and sorely needed just then

was power to believe in God and himself ; and which of us can give that power to any man ? I could but remind him of the words which Tyne had sung more sweetly than I could say them.

“Wait patiently for Him, and fret not thyself because of evil-doers.”

He said no more after that. A great calm seemed to come over him. Was it the words only, or the singer too, that had done him good ? I think Tyne had something to do with it, for after awhile he said,

“How could that girl know just what I needed ?”

And then,

“It is the second sermon she has preached to me. The little flowers were the first.”

CHAPTER XII.

"H E'S a rare one, he is," said Joe Rollekins, after our new curate had been with us three or four months. "He'll set us straight, see if he don't. We've wanted a man this a good bit past to speak up for us poor folks, and he's doing it now right well. I wouldn't mind stinting fire and food a bit now and then to hear such a sermon as he give us last Sunday morning."

"Yes, Joe," I said, rather proudly; "he doesn't wear out so fast as the people thought he would at first. They told us, you know, it was only a flash-in-the-pan. I wonder what they think now?"

“Flash-in-the-pan !” and Joe gave his bundle of cord a contemptuous twitch—he was mending crab-pots in his little back yard. “He’s none the sort to make a flash-in-the-pan. I never heard him speak a word yet as didn’t make you feel there was plenty more o’ the same sort to come on the back of it. He don’t put his best herrings at the top of the basket, and let you take your chance for what’s underneath.”

“That depends on what people call good, Joe. I am afraid some of the coal and iron people about here will begin to think the herrings taste rather strong of the smoke.”

“Maybe they do, miss, and better for them as has ’em to buy. Folks don’t like anything as comes over near home. I’d a uncle once, Miss Dora, made a tidy little bit of money in the pork butchering, and there never was such a one as him for

turning away his head when he come near a pig-stye after he was retired. That's the way with a many of 'em ; they like to kick the ladder down behind them when they've got to the top. Maybe you've never heard Mrs. Ullathorne say anything about sugar-plums and lollipops ?"

I could not in honour say that I ever had.

"No, Miss Dora, and that's the reason why, because her father got his living by selling 'em, and left her a nice little bit of money when he'd done. I think, if I'd known it, I should have mentioned 'em when she was letting fly at me about the new church ; not as a man's any the worse for selling sugar-plums ; I shouldn't ha' learnt a deal from Mr. Elphinston, if I thought that ; but them as belongs to him hadn't ought to talk as if they was born princesses. That's all I have to say about it."

“Well, Joe, I think if we all of us practised what Mr. Elphinston preaches, the coal people would never have needed to come to us for money for their new church.”

“No more they would, miss, for every man of them would set to work to keep his own step clean. And if they did that, I reckon there’d be a vast of new besoms bought at Coley-Orton, and a deal of dirt swept into the gutters. But if you’ll excuse me, miss, it’s time these here crab pots was took out.”

So Joe and I parted.

Not many weeks after that, the greatest trouble he had ever known came upon him in the loss of his wife.

Poor woman ! she earned her death as she had spent her life, in doing the best she could for her husband. He had gone out at nightfall, in the little boat which he owned with two other men, and a storm sprang up, with driving, drenching rain.

Betsy could not stay in her quiet bed whilst the man she loved was battling for his life on the ocean; and battle he must, for she knew what it meant when the great waves came into the bay with that hollow roaring sound, and neither moon nor light to show where the rock reef stretched out beyond the headland. So she got up and went out upon the shore, and wandered about in the driving rain, looking for the glimmer of the little lamp which might tell where her husband's boat was labouring through the storm.

He came back safe and sound, only spent with his night's toil; and Betsy, tending him, rejoicing over him, forgot how she was drenched through and through with the driving rains. She took cold, and sickened, and died within a week, and Joe refused to be comforted. He seemed to feel that her death had been a sacrifice to her love for him.

"If she'd have been took in a regular way, Miss Dora," he said, as I sat beside him in the death-darkened cottage, "I shouldn't have minded it so much, for we'd had a good share of our life together, and it stands to reason one of us must go first, whether or no. But it was all along of me as she got her death, bless her! and begging and praying of me as she'd done many a night not to go out with the boat when the wind was getting up, but I only laughed at her. I knew it would do me no harm, but I never thought what it might do for her. Ay, Miss Dora, you never know what you've lost till they're gone. I might have kept her a deal longer if I'd been as careful over her as she was over me; but now there's an end of it."

Joe's eyes were only misty with quiet tears. He was not the man to rave over his troubles. He just stayed in his place, and let the great waves break upon him,

like some shattered old wreck that is fast upon a rock, and makes no sign when the storm smites it.

I ventured to suggest to him that dreary commonplace with which, though having all the time such a pitiful sense of its insufficiency, we generally try to comfort those who have veiled their faces before the presence of death, that the departed are happier elsewhere.

"Yes, Miss Dora, so they say, but it's neither me nor you knows much about it, to comfort ourselves with that. I *knew* she was all right here, and wanted for nothing while I was nigh hand to get it for her; and maybe she's as right where she's took to now, but when you've said that, it's all you've got to say, and *maybe* is a cold word to lap them up in as you've loved and cared for all your life."

"But, Joe," said I, for I was shocked and startled to see now, what I might have

looked for naturally enough, that the old man's strong, questioning, matter-of-fact mind was asking for absolute certainty about that "elsewhere" which to all but simple God-given faith is a sublime perchance. And it seemed to me in those days that all who had not won to such faith, or, from the peculiarities of their mental constitution, could not unwaveringly rest in it, were quite out of the right track. "You do believe in another life, do you not?"

"I don't say as I do, Miss Dora," said the old man, looking wistfully to the closed door of the room where something that he had once loved and kissed and caressed lay very cold and straight now, caring no more for any kiss that he could give—closed door, alas! which Reason could never open, and at which the loftiest faith could but kneel with shut eyes and clasped hands, seeing nothing, waiting only,—“I

don't say as I do, Miss Dora, and I don't say as I don't. All I can say is, I know nothing at all about it. Can you tell me any more than that?"

"No."

"When Betsy and me was together, I never asked myself no questions, only was I doing my duty; and I left God Almighty to take care of the rest. It seemed to me as I'd nothing to do with what come afterwards, so long as I was keeping a straight course ahead, and had my old woman beside of me; and we said our bits of prayers together, and read our Bibles, and laid us down to sleep, as quiet as babes, because we felt it was all right. God was taking care on us both, and we never asked no more."

"Well, Joe, but isn't he taking care of you both now too?" I said.

"Miss Dora, that's more than I can tell. I've never been a learn'd man, only just to

see what lay near-hand me; and while Betsy and me was together, it was easy enough to believe that all was right. If hard times comed, we never neither of us complained, for we only had to live a bit harder and work a bit sharper; and if we was one on us took bad, it was only for the t'other to be a bit kinder, and it come right again afore long. There was nought but what we could see and trusten for. But it's got past that now."

"And yet, Joe, how often you have stood up in church and said, 'I believe in the life everlasting.'"

"Yes, Miss Dora, and I sort of believe in it now; but I don't know nothing, and I'm thinking it isn't what you believe, but what you know, as makes the difference when the worst comes to the worst. I can't get no farther than this—to stick fast to God Almighty, and I know He'll do the best for us all. It isn't believing,

isn't that—it's *knowing*; and that's all I've got to hold to. But what God's best may be, it beats me to find out; it may be a vast different to my best, and there it has to rest."

How baffled and ignorant I felt as I came away from that sad, strong old man's cottage! In all my narrow experience I had never looked into the dark of the other life with that earnest intensity of longing which cannot be content with less than sight. No one whom I loved with all my heart had ever been taken from me by death; and until we *know* such loss, we only speak vain words about our faith in the Hereafter. Yet Joe had got on the rock which is better than all creeds. God knows what is best—God will do it; and clinging there, he looked with pitiful, dumb patience into the gloom of which none could tell him anything, save that it is impenetrable.

After that, Joe Rollekins became more of a reader and a thinker than ever. There was one less to work for. He did not take anyone else to live with him, but just looked after his own affairs and kept his own house. The fishing-boat need not go out so often now. Joe used to spend many an hour, which before had to be given to bread-winning, in sitting by his lonely fireside, reading the books which my father and Mr. Elphinston lent him, or in conning over the newspapers in the town reading-room. It was a curious sight to see him, in his coarse blue worsted blouse and sea-bleached flannel trousers, poring over the pages of the *Guardian*—for after Mr. Elphinston came amongst us, Joe took a great interest in matters ecclesiastical,—or patiently plodding through the *Times* leaders, or reading the Parliamentary debates, his big bushy brows bent now and then in doubt over some big word,

whose meaning finally had to be settled by spelling it over and bringing it to my father for explanation. And sometimes the grand folk who came there to glance over the news of the day would, for the fun of the thing, take a little notice of the sturdy old fisherman, patronize him kindly, ask him if he understood what he read. Whereupon Joe would turn his weather-beaten face upon them, and rapidly taking their mental measure, get them into a discussion on politics or church matters, in which they generally had the worst of it.

I never knew a man who had so little party attachment as Joe. Tories and Liberals, High Church, Broad and Low, all used to receive in turns sharp raps from the knuckles of his vigorous common sense. And perhaps the quaint simplicity of the old coastguardsman, his utter unconsciousness of anything like talent or originality

in himself, gave the finishing touch to his strokes.

Then he would come back to his lonely cottage, and make his cup of tea, and light his pipe, and sit there thinking, thinking, while the long waves rolled in upon the beach, and back with monotonous under-song, so like the break and backward flow of his own questioning on that hereafter shore, of which the best and wisest among us know no more than the little child.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. Collinson, the parish churchwarden, who had sent John Elphinston home so weary and disheartened, was a good man, but the channel of his ideas was so narrow that any current of opinion flowing down it, must needs gain in intensity what it lacked in breadth. Most men who make a profession of religion—at least, most churchwardens—must have a certain amount of religious activity and earnestness in their natures; only in some, this activity is diffused over a moderate extent of country, pleasantly fertilising and diversifying it; whilst in others it is built up between the narrowest possible limits,

and spends its strength in turning the mill-wheel of some particular opinion or crotchet.

Mr. Collinson had a great dread of removing or departing from the old landmarks—that is, spiritual ones. He liked things to be done, services to be gone through, sermons to be preached, religious facts to be taught, just as they had been done, preached, and taught in the times of his father and grandfather. He could not believe in anything which had not grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength. He looked upon any tendency to strike out into new paths of thought as one of the most dangerous symptoms of modern times, and even objected to see familiar truths attired in any other costume than that which they had worn in the days of his youth.

How he reconciled this intense religious conservatism with that onward march of material prosperity which had swept away

almost every landmark of the simple honest old times from amongst us, I never discovered. Perhaps rights of development might be accorded to a municipal council, which might be dangerous to a human soul. If people will come and settle in a place, and buy and sell and get gain, the solicitor who arranges their quarrels for them, and secures the title-deeds of their houses, and in various other ways attends to their well-being, must needs extend the landmarks of his income from time to time, as well as those of the establishment which his wife and daughters think it necessary to keep up. But that this process of expansion should be extended to his mental, moral, and spiritual affairs, is a condition which ought not to be admitted. It would involve too much uncertainty. One cannot admit a new thought into one's mind as one admits a hundred a year to one's income; or drop a favourite old prejudice, as

one drops the last year's overcoat when fashion decrees that velvet collars must be worn by all who wish to be thought gentlemen. Life would be altogether too shifting then.

So Mr. Collinson bound up his religious opinions with a good stout rope, which kept them securely in their place, whilst he let all the rest of him expand according to circumstances.

But, after the light he possessed, he was an honest man. He never did a thing—I mean in his religious life—from mere self-interest; still less would he ever wound a man for the sake of giving him pain. I felt quite sure that if he had taken upon himself to remonstrate with Mr. Elphinston upon the want of unction in his ministry, he would do it with deep regret, and from a sense of duty which could not be crushed down.

But, at the same time, he would do it

persistently. When Mr. Collinson once got hold of an idea, he kept it before him until he had carried it out; and it was as impossible to convince him that his idea was not the right one, or to turn him from his own particular way of carrying it out, as to prevent the tide from coming slowly up, wave by wave, to the high-water mark which it intended to reach at a given time.

Therefore I was conscious of a secret uneasiness when I heard that he had begun to express dissatisfaction with the style of John Elphinston's preaching; for I knew certainly enough that that preaching would never be altered to suit any man's opinion. The high, narrow current of the church-warden's prejudices was not more mighty than the broad, steady tidal-wave of the curate's convictions. What, after painful, patient search—search forcing him often into strange wildernesses of thought, and

bringing him face to face with many a wrestling angel—he found to be the truth, that, and that only, and the whole of that, would John Elphinston preach, let all the Mr. Collinsons in the world stand against him, with a perfect Niagara of will or prejudice power.

But in the meantime that pic-nic was to be carried out, which Mrs. Ullathorne had set her mind upon as being such a good means of raising money for the new church at Coley-Orton.

It was arranged for September, the most fashionable month in all the year at Cove Rossington. A rather high price was set upon the tickets, which were to be purchased from the churchwardens of the two parishes; and, to make sure that no questionable company would be on the ground, all persons not resident in the place who wished to purchase tickets were required to produce vouchers from some member

of the committee. Everyone was to be called upon for subscriptions, which were to go towards the provision of luncheon and four o'clock tea upon the ground, so that the whole proceeds of the pic-nic would be available for the church-building fund.

Mrs. Ullathorne came in due time to tell me all about it.

"Not, dear Miss Leslie, that I expect *you* will go," she said, putting me comfortably on the shelf from the very beginning. "I know superior people, like yourself and Mr. Leslie, have very little taste for amusements of this kind; but still they do very well for the generality of the wealthy and fashionable set, and of course we have them to consider. Then, you know, we have been obliged to put the price of the tickets rather high, to secure a handsome profit for the fund; and, as I know you are obliged to consider expense, I thought

it would scarcely be kind to ask you to take one."

Of course I said it was very good of her to take my circumstances into account in that way. I did not think I could have afforded half a guinea for a day's pleasure, even allowing that my "superiority" would have found pleasure in it.

"No," Mrs. Ullathorne replied, brightly and amiably enough, as if the want of half-guineas was a condition rather to be congratulated about than otherwise. "I said when they put your name down on my list as one of the ladies to take tickets, that I was quite sure you would not consider yourself justified in going to such an expense. And so, you know, my dear Miss Leslie, as I took it for granted that you would not go, I asked Mr. Elphinston to join our party. Poor man! You see, he could not go alone, and of course he must be there, to give his sanction to the thing."

So now I knew why Mrs. Ullathorne had come in to fetch Birdie that night, and carried Mr. Elphinston off as an escort, that she might secure his company for the pic-nic. A very excellent precaution, as otherwise he might possibly enough have gone with Miss Wear or Miss Fidger.

“Poor young man!” the elegant diplomatist continued, “it is really quite a pity that he has not more presence in society. One has to draw him out so, to get him to speak a word. I tell him he is almost as bad as my own dear brother, and by the way I meant to mention that Herbert will not be able to go with us to the pic-nic. Such a press of work, you know, at the office just now, as Lord Rossington is so anxious to get the place finished by next year. It is a great disappointment to him; because although he is so quiet, still he enjoys a little company now and then. He was telling me only the other night, how

much he likes coming in for a rubber with your father, and really I say to him that he ought to bring me with him sometimes."

If Mrs. Ullathorne intended me to be vexed, she accomplished her purpose. She had made remarks of that kind to me several times before, remarks which conveyed a distinct under-meaning, and left no room for bold reply. And though a woman may become poor and plain enough to be quite out of reach of actual harm from such insinuations, still she never becomes unconscious enough to be indifferent to them. Fortunately I was able to cover my vexation with a mantle of urbanity almost as thick and well wadded as Mrs. Ullathorne's own, and I told her with exquisite politeness that the presence of a fifth would spoil our rubber.

"Ah! then Mr. Elphinston joins you. Well, poor man, I am sure he must need a

little change sometimes. It does not do for people always to be feeding upon their own thoughts, however grand the thoughts may be. I am so glad that dear Birdie has taken to him. Her bright pretty ways will do him so much good. You know she helps him in the Sunday-school now, and all that sort of thing. I tell her she must be careful."

And Mrs. Ullathorne gave me a pretty little confidential nod.

"She must be careful not to go too far. That is, you know, unless of course——"

And again another little confidential telegram. Why should not the two young people take a fancy to each other if they liked?

"But I trust to Birdie's own good sense. She has a great deal of discretion. I am never afraid of her going too far. Dear child, she has been so active about this pic-nic. I am sure Coley-Orton ought to

get up a testimonial to her, she has spent so much time in going about for subscriptions, and has promised to sing at amateur concerts for them during the Winter. And we have some idea of a bazaar after Christmas, if Mr. Elphinston and the Coley-Orton clergyman will work together for it."

I fancied John Elphinston giving his mind to the preliminaries of a bazaar, and then mooning about amongst the young ladies behind the stalls. A better occupation perhaps for him, as regarded popularity with his parishioners, than preaching sermons which only taught them their duty and shook their comfortable self-sufficiency.

"Only you see," Mrs. Ullathorne continued, "he doesn't go about enough amongst the people, excepting the sick and poor ones, to make himself really beloved. Mr. Collinson was complaining of it to me the other day, and I just mentioned it to

Mr. Elphinston, for I think a little hint from a friend sometimes does good. I really don't know what you do, Miss Leslie, to make yourself so agreeable, but he seems to grudge every hour he spends away from the house, at least in general society."

"Well, you see a young man must read," I suggested, not liking to take credit to ourselves for the congeniality of our companionship.

"Oh! yes. And of course his sermons require a good deal of thought, though they do not give you the impression of great research. I daresay he studies men rather than books. Ted says he knows very little, comparatively, of theology; but then you know Ted has given a great deal of attention to that department, so that he perhaps takes more notice of any deficiency in it."

It was quite a new idea to me that Mr.

Ullathorne had given a great deal of attention to anything, except his own dress and appearance, which certainly did much more credit to the attention than his theology. I accepted the position, however, but hinted that Mr. Elphinston's exceptional talent might perhaps serve him in the stead of a very rigorous theological training, like that which Mr. Ullathorne was undergoing.

“ Oh ! yes, I daresay. He is very clever, there is no mistake about that. It is a thousand pities he has not been to either of the Universities ; that always makes such a difference to a young man's position. But still, as you say, his talents will no doubt get him on, and if anything should happen to Mr. Dewtrie, there is not a question, I should think, about Lord Rossington giving him the living. They say Lord Rossington is wonderfully pleased with him.”

And then Mrs. Ullathorne came to the real purpose of her visit, which was to ask me for a subscription for the pic-nic fund. For, though I could not afford half a guinea for my own enjoyment, it was in the highest degree proper that I should contribute five shillings towards the enjoyment of other people.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was just about this time that a curious coincidence brought me face to face with a past that I thought was quite laid away and done with. Yet I do not know why we should think it curious to find bits of our own lives dovetailed into the lives of other people, and certainly this drew me nearer to John Elphinston than I had ever been before.

One evening he had brought us his book of photographs to look at. He kept it on his study shelf, along with a lot of other books, and I hope I may mention, as proof of my honourable disposition, that I had

never taken it down to peep into it, though I have a great interest in these miniature portrait galleries, and could sit for hours making up stories about the different faces they contain. As he turned over the leaves for me now, we came upon one which made me pause. It was the portrait of Rae Morrison.

It was the first I had ever seen, for in the old days when he came to our house these pretty little album pictures were not, and since then, of course, we had had no communication with him.

I say "of course," though I do not know why I should put that phrase in. For my father always mentioned his name with great respect and kindliness. It was not at all dropped out of our conversation. Indeed I had learned to talk about him now as quietly as about my poor Aunt Lois, who had been dead for more than thirteen years. He had been dead, to me at least,

for more than thirteen years, too, and why should I not talk about him quietly enough ? But we had never happened to mention him to Mr. Elphinston.

How strange it seemed to look upon Rae Morrison's face again, having seen it since all those years only in the dim light of memory. It was older than the Rae Morrison of my girlish remembrance, having been taken apparently within the last five or six years. The hair, which used to be just a little grey, showed quite silver now ; the shoulders were broader and heavier, and there were the strong deep lines upon the face which come of age and care. But still anyone would have said he was a fine-looking man ; perhaps finer-looking than when we used to know him so well, for then the features told chiefly of frank, genial good-nature, and now there was a touch of almost stern, sorrowful dignity upon them.

"I know that face," I said, staying Mr. Elphinston's hand as he was going to turn over the leaf.

"Indeed. Mr. Morrison, Captain Rae Morrison of Bonnermouth? Was he a friend of yours?"

"Yes," and I passed the portrait across for my father to see. "He used to come to our house a long, long time ago, when I was quite a girl. In those days he belonged to a ship which sailed from Shagmouth Port. But how came you to know him too?"

"He was very kind to me when I was a lad. Did I not tell you of the gentleman who helped me so much?"

"Oh yes, I remember."

"Well, then, it was Mr. Morrison. I owe almost everything to him. I could not have pushed through circumstances for myself as he pushed through them all for me."

I could understand that, well enough. John Elphinston could fight and lay low a legion of spiritual enemies, but when it came to personal contact with men and things, that terrible shyness of his made him almost as vulnerable as a mollusc. Rae Morrison, whose spiritual life, I should think, was much less vivid and intense, could do far better battle with the foes of accident and circumstance. Mr. Elphinston continued—how little he knew the interest with which I listened, looking at that face all the time——

“Nothing ever conquered Mr. Morrison, when he had once made up his mind to help me. I don’t think he cared much for books himself, or study, but he knew they would be the making of me, and he never rested until he had found a way for me to go to St. Bee’s. I never needed a friend after I began to know him. Poor Mr. Morrison!”

And then after a little pause he said,

"But I suppose it will be made up to him some day."

Why had he said "Poor Mr. Morrison?" And I looked at the portrait more closely. Yes, the face was very sad, sadder than the face I remembered so well, and with almost a look of bitterness upon it, which age alone could never bring to a strong man like him. And then I remembered that little slip of paper laid away in my desk.

"Aged twenty-eight, Jessie, wife of Rae Morrison."

That was enough surely to make a man look sad.

"This has been taken, then, since his wife's death," I said.

"No. I suppose he had been married about a couple of years when he gave me that."

"Did you know Mrs. Morrison?"

“A little. Only a little.”

“Was she very pleasant? Was she pretty?”

“Rather pretty. Not much of a companion for a man like him, I think, for she was very fond of company and gaiety, and had been accustomed to it all her life. He had only known her six weeks when they married. His vessel was going away for a long voyage, and her parents wished her to be settled. But how strange that you should know anybody that I know! It is the first outside link of any kind that we have found out between us. I am very glad. It makes me feel that I belong to you a little more.”

Only a “little more?” It brought him very, very near to me, for I felt that every kindness I did to him was done, through him, to the man who loved him and cared for him.

I think he saw that we were much

interested in the picture, for he took it out of the book and gave it to me, saying that he had two or three others. How earnestly, in my own room that night, I studied every line and feature of that well-remembered face! How, little by little, the old likeness came out, through the rent veil of age and sadness! I went over again all the sweet past, from the first day I saw him in Joe Rollekins' cottage, onward through that happy year of waiting and hoping, until he came back again; and suddenly, as it had kindled, the light of my life went out.

Could it indeed be more than thirteen years ago? And could I be the same Dora Leslie who had taken so great a joy as my right, never thanking God for it when it came, only lifting up tearful eyes to Him when it was taken away? What had become of the old self which had little by little dropped away from me? What

had become of that quick upspringing gladness, almost as keen as pain, which I could never, never feel any more? Where had I gone, for indeed I was not the Dora of the old times? My soul was as different as my face. No power in heaven or earth could bring back to me that glorious youth of spirit, any more than it could give my hollow cheeks and faded face the rose and roundness of youth. And yet it was very sweet to remember it all, and through the sight of Ræ Morrison's face to go back to myself as I had been thirteen years ago.

After that I often used to talk to Mr. Elphinston about him; and very pleasant it was to me to hear of his faithful friendship, the many little acts of kindness for which he would take neither thanks nor reward, the quiet, unostentatious way in which he would deny himself for another's good, where some people would have an-

nounced their charity by a flourish of trumpets. I could believe it all quite well. It was nothing new to me. And I had a proud satisfaction in knowing that this was the man who, years and years ago, had loved me enough to ask me for his wife.

But it was not until long after that that Mr. Elphinston told me the sad story of Rae Morrison's short married life. After only a few weeks acquaintance he had become the husband of gay, pretty, fashionable Jessie. Then he had gone on one of his long voyages, and coming home, found that she had fallen from her allegiance to him. The rest of the story was soon told. To stifle the remorse which preyed upon her—for Jessie was not at heart a wicked woman, only vain and foolish—she began to drink, and so, little more than two years after her marriage, killed herself. Perhaps it was the best thing she could do, for she had not force enough of

character to retrieve her past, nor noble humility enough to live the rest of her life in the shadow which must always rest upon such guilt as hers. After her death Mr. Morrison seldom came to Bonnermouth. He took longer voyages, staying for a year or eighteen months away at a time. He happened to be home from one of these voyages when John Elphinston had just finished his college course, and he used his influence to get him the curacy in Staffordshire. Once again since then he had been home, and now he was away on a voyage which would last for perhaps a year, for they were going to touch at many foreign ports and take in different cargoes.

I could understand then what had brought the hard, almost bitter lines to his face, and I said to myself how different it might have been! But Mr. Elphinston, having once told me the story, never referred to it again, nor did I.

CHAPTER XV.

SHAGMOUTH GRIP, the scene of the proposed pic-nic, was a wild, picturesque spot, eight or nine miles away from Cove Rossington. It was a huge ravine in the cliff, grown over with gorse and hazel. In some parts the sides sloped gently down, with level patches of fern and moss and wild-flowers, accessible to venturesome climbers ; in others they dropped, a sheer precipice, for forty or fifty feet. A little brook ran through it, breaking into a pretty cascade where the land had slipped away, then going peacefully on its way seawards.

•

Shagmouth was a gradual ascent all the way from Rossington, so that from its topmost cliffs there was a splendid prospect up and down the coast-line. The scenery there, too, was wilder and more rugged than with us, the cliffs more precipitous; great black ledges of rock stretched out into the sea, forming a sort of natural pier, over which, in rough weather, the waves dashed a cloud of surf that could be seen as far away as our house. Landwards, the prospect was almost as fine. Not a coal-pit nor a forge was to be seen; only woods creeping up the hill-sides, and streams cutting their way down little rifts in the moorlands, and here and there a farmstead sheltered from the north by a plantation of fir-trees, or some sportsman's shooting-box, standing like a child's toy-house in the midst of broom and heather and copse. In days gone by, Shagmouth Grip had been a great place for smugglers.

Strange stories were told of fights and murders in the dark rock caves underneath ; of treasures buried here and there in almost inaccessible parts of the ravine ; of coast-guardsmen who had been quietly pushed over the precipice whilst on duty, by men prowling about behind the hazel-copses. But all that was far enough away in the past, and only served now to make a pleasant background for imagination to work upon. No pursuit more harmful than bird's-nesting or fern-hunting was ever carried on in that pretty ravine, and its sheltered woodland paths bore witness only to the most innocent lovers' talk, instead of the black plottings of the smuggler.

I did go to the pic-nic after all, though not in such a way as appeared likely at first to interfere with Mrs. Ullathorne's pleasant little scheme for securing Mr. Elphinston to Birdie. About half an hour

before the time for starting, and after he had gone to join the Ullathorne party, Tyne came to me in great distress. Some friends from Bonnermouth had arrived for the day, and her mother was unable to leave them. So she wanted to know if I would chaperon her, for Miss Fidger had already gone, and there was no one else at hand.

I was glad to do Tyne a kindness ; the poor girl seemed so dreadfully disappointed, and she had dressed herself so prettily, and looked so bonnie in her round sailor hat and short gipsy cloak of bright blue, that I felt it would be too bad to keep her at home. So I put on the grey holland dress which seemed as much a part of myself as my own character, and providing myself with a book in case of loneliness, for of course nobody ever sought me out at a pic-nic now, we started.

The thing was very well arranged.

Everybody could be independent, if so disposed, of everybody else; the only necessary meeting-point being the large gaily-decorated tent where at one o'clock we were to assemble for luncheon, and at four for afternoon tea. There were donkeys at the little inn for those who wished to journey farther on to Shagmouth Port, and see the shipping. There was croquet, then in its earliest infancy, for those who liked a little leisurely flirtation. There was music for the dancers; archery for those who could take pleasure in it; and, if anyone happened to be inclined for a water excursion, there were boats moored alongside the great ledge of rocks, to which a winding path led down the cliff. Also there was the inevitable gipsy, who never fails to turn up at a pic-nic, with her black eyes and her brown baby, and a wandering Savoyard, with two roguish little lads, who sang the quaintest songs and cut the

most ridiculous capers for halfpence or biscuits, so that for amusement we wanted not.

Tyne was in her element at a pic-nic. She was in that hey-day of youth and health and vigour when no exertion is too great and no effort too exhausting ; when the long climb which makes middle age puff and pant and tremble, only brings brighter light to the eye and fresher roses to the cheek ; when the tough scramble through brake and brier, which reduces half-faded charms to a pitiable state of frowsiness and chaos, only tosses brown curls into prettier confusion, and tips the coquettish hat more jauntily over a face which was surely arch enough before ; when every prospect pleases, and not even man himself is vile ; nay, so far from being anything of the sort, is a most agreeable adjunct to the prospect, and forms occasionally its crowning charm.

There is another season at which picnics, after having been for some years a weariness to the flesh, begin again to have a delight of their own, and that is towards middle life, when the feverish eagerness is passed which must have the best of everything for its own; when one can take neglect without bitterness, and forgetfulness without any sense of wrong; when one can be content to be let alone, passed over—indeed, when to be let alone is the pleasantest thing of all; when it is enough to see the young and the bright and the pretty sought after, petted, flattered, whilst sober grey holland is left to enjoy itself as best it may, having lost the witchery of youth, and not yet attained to the lofty dignity of age.

This was my season. For though I did not nearly count my years by forty yet, I was as truly middle-aged as the gravest and quietest among them—quite as much

so now as dear little Miss Fidger, to whom, when I had deposited Tyne in the midst of an archery-party, I attached myself. For Miss Fidger had seen enough of stir and gaiety in her youth to get her, as one might say, into a habit of brightness; whereas I had scarcely had any youth at all, the darker fortunes of my life having come before its noon.

People kept gathering all the morning. About half the company had assembled when we arrived. To my surprise, almost the first person I saw was Mr. Surbiton, who ought to have been detained at his office by "such an unfortunate press of work." He seemed rather out of his element, wandering about from one group to another in a melancholy, undecided sort of way. Mrs. Ullathorne, in a stylishly simple morning-dress, was the centre of attraction to a cluster of middle-aged gentlemen, whom she was entertaining with

that vivacity and brilliance which had already made her one of the most popular women in Cove Rossington. For Mrs. Ullathorne there appeared to be neither middle age, nor shadow, nor decline. She was so exactly charming that you never wished her to be either older or younger. What she did was always the right thing to do; what she said was just the right thing to say. She was like a prettily-painted float, always in its place at the top of everything, and keeping there with the easy grace of one made for the position.

Mr. Elphinston and Birdie I could nowhere discover, so concluded that they had been dispatched for a walk by themselves. Tyne, as I said, was picked up by an archery party, amongst whom was Ted Ullathorne. She could shoot with almost the precision of a William Tell, and was pretty sure to bring victory to whichever

side she took. When she was safely disposed of, several matron ladies of her acquaintance being in the party, Miss Fidger and I betook ourselves to a little heathery knoll near the top of the cliff, where we could sit and watch the gay groups of people below, or, if that pleased us better, turn to the great calm blue sea, flecked over with white sails, which looked no bigger than a sea-gull's wing.

"I'm sure it's quite a mercy you are here," said the bright little woman, "or I don't know what would have become of me. Mrs. Ullathorne would insist upon my taking a ticket, and giving them a subscription too, which I thought was rather hard upon me; but she has such a way that really you cannot help yourself. I don't care what she asks for, she is sure to get it out of you, sooner or later, and so pleasant and affable to everybody. I told her it was not the least bit of use my

coming to a thing like this, for I don't know any of the new people, and one feels like a cracked bell in a peal when you are different from everybody else."

"Just my case," I said. "I only came to help poor Tyne out of her difficulty. Mrs. Wear is detained at home by friends from Bonnermouth, and it seemed such a pity for the girl to be disappointed. But I would ten times rather have been at home, mending stockings."

"So would I, and I told Mrs. Ullathorne so—at least, something to the same effect—but she said my not knowing anybody need not make a bit of difference, for she would find me out as soon as I arrived, and we could be together all the time; so on the strength of that I came."

"And was it on the strength of that that I found you wandering all alone amongst those donkeys in front of the inn?"

"Well, you see, one can never tell what is going to happen. Mrs. Ullathorne did find me out, or rather, I found her out as soon as I came, but she was busy amongst a lot of people, and could only just give me a smile, and promise to come to me very soon. And then I thought I would hire a donkey, and go to Shagmouth Port. I always enjoy tar and shipping, and I was looking out for a tolerably strong one when you appeared."

It was so like Mrs. Ullathorne, and yet no one ever seemed to think of being vexed with her. A smile set everything straight again, let her forgetfulness have placed you in ever so humiliating a position. If one can't be faithful to one's friends, I do think the next best thing is to be able to smile pleasantly upon them.

"Have you seen Mr. Elphinston?" I asked.

"Yes, he and Birdie have walked up to

the Shagmouth Heads. Mrs. Ullathorne told them they would have such a splendid prospect, the day being so clear."

"But what a walk ! And Birdie so delicate that she must never be on her feet an hour together."

"Yes ; but then, in an air like this, girls can do anything. Besides, Mrs. Ullathorne told them if they were not back in time for luncheon, she would see that something was put aside for them, so that they will be able to stop and rest by the way. It looks rather marked, but I suppose the beauty of a pic-nic is that people can do almost anything they like. Now, I daresay, if Mr. Elphinston was to take half an hour's walk with any young lady down at the Cove, society would say directly that there was an understanding between them. Look, there they are, ever so far away towards Shagmouth. I can see Birdie's scarlet scarf, no bigger than a geranium leaf."

So could I, a mile away at any rate. Most likely Mrs. Ullathorne would have to put away a comfortable little private luncheon for the young people. And I wondered whether Mr. Elphinston was enjoying his walk very much.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE sat for a long time on that little heathery knoll, watching the people moving about below, continually changing and re-appearing, like the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope. Nobody wanted us, we wanted nobody. I kept Tyne's sailor hat and blue ribbon well in my field of view, and so long as she was all right, I was.

By and by Mr. Surbiton joined us. We had seen him strolling aimlessly in our direction, like a man who neither knows nor cares where he is going ; but when he caught sight of us, encamped on our pleasant breezy height, he quickened his pace,

as if decidedly relieved to find some one who could make any sort of point in the monotony of his day.

“Good morning, ladies. It is quite refreshing to catch sight of a familiar face. My sister would make me come ; but I am like a fish out of water amongst archery and croquet, and all the rest of it. Pray, are *you* enjoying the pic-nic very much ?—for I cannot say that I am.”

“I don’t know that we are enjoying the pic-nic very much,” said Miss Fidger, merrily ; “but I am quite sure that we are enjoying each other’s society very much ; and if you like to join us, we will try to make you as contented as ourselves. We felt rather like fishes out of water too, down yonder, so we thought we had best return to our native element. Here is plenty of room for you on this bank.”

Poor Mr. Surbiton’s face changed as much as that of nature does when the sun

rises upon it. He was really a very sociable, kindly-disposed man, only so accustomed to be managed and acted for by his sister, that he had almost lost the power of asserting himself. Miss Fidger made him feel quite at home with us. He might be said to sun himself in our elderly smiles, almost as much as his younger brethren were doing in those of the pretty fashionables down below, with this advantage—that we had no intentions beyond making the time pass agreeably.

It did pass so agreeably that we were astonished when the one-o'clock bell called us to the luncheon tent. Mr. Elphinston and Birdie were out of reach of it. For a full half hour the little bit of scarlet had been stationary at a distant point on the cliff, with a speck of black sometimes near it, sometimes wandering about in a manner which hinted to me that Mr. Elphinston did not find his companion interesting.

Mr. Surbiton escorted us to the tent and found places for us. It was really astonishing how he opened out when freed from the smothering influence of his relations. I think he would have gone on having a very pleasant time with us, only before luncheon was served Mrs. Ullathorne came bearing down in our direction, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Miss Fidger, I do beg your pardon a thousand, thousand times. I have been abominably rude to you, but I could not help myself, I could not indeed. They got round me and would keep me talking about that bazaar, and get me to promise a stall and all sorts of things. And you here too, Miss Leslie. Why, this *is* an unexpected pleasure."

I think the unexpectedness was more than the pleasure, judging from a sudden asperity in Mrs. Ullathorne's face, as she glanced from me to Mr. Surbiton. I ex-

plained that I had come as chaperon to Miss Wear, and that, having disposed of her, and found Miss Fidger in the same unprotected condition as myself, we had adjourned to the top of the cliff, where Mr. Surbiton had found us. And I added, with a touch of spite which I think any woman under the circumstances would have felt, that he must enjoy the holiday very much, after such a terrible press of work at the office.

But if I thought to disconcert Mrs. Ullathorne, I was very much mistaken. You might as well try to wound the polished outside of a solid Winter apple by putting it to the gums of a month-old baby. Mrs. Ullathorne's smile was as brilliant as ever, her affability as charming.

"So glad you have come, after all! I would have sent you a ticket myself, only you see if I began, I should have to go on with it all round, and that would have run away with our profit so terribly. But,

Herbert, dear," and she laid her hand on her brother's arm, "there is poor dear Mrs. Collinson without anyone in the world to attend to her. Do go at once, there's a good creature. I wouldn't on any account have her think herself neglected, and the wife of the churchwarden, too."

"Can't you go yourself?" suggested dense Mr. Surbiton, "you entertain people so much better than I can."

Mrs. Ullathorne gave her brother a look which revealed the woman to me in an entirely new character. It said, as plainly as could be, that she was accustomed to be obeyed, and meant to be obeyed. It astonished me almost as much as if a peacock butterfly had alighted on my hand and stung me sharply. Mr. Surbiton, however, took it meekly enough; went away to do the agreeable to Mrs. Collinson, and his sister was soon all smiles and sweetness again.

"I don't know what I must do, Miss Leslie, with that Mr. Elphinston of yours. He and Birdie seem quite to have taken things into their own hands to-day. To think now of his carrying her off to the top of Shagmouth Foreland, to see the prospect. Did you ever hear of anything like it?"

I had heard of something a little like it, the only difference being in the person carried off; but it was not my place to tell Mrs. Ullathorne that I knew she had made the arrangement herself, and she went on, turning to me with a pleasant little air of confidence.

"Poor fellow! I suppose he is not accustomed to the ways of the world, though of course no one wonders at anything when people are out for a holiday. And then, you know, Birdie is such an innocent creature. I often tell her she gives encouragement when she means nothing of the kind, just by her pretty engaging ways,

and Mr. Elphinston is evidently a very impressionable young man. Just fancy now, if they should have come to an understanding."

I wonder why stylish manners and an elegant morning-dress can say things which would be perfectly intolerable in an ordinary woman. If Mrs. Guttridge had made such a remark to me, I should have got up and walked away, utterly astonished and disgusted; but how could I be guilty of such a rudeness towards Mrs. Ullathorne the beautiful?

"Now wouldn't it be ridiculous?" she asked.

I replied that the young people would have to answer that question for themselves.

"Well, yes, of course," and she smiled complacently. "And, do you know, I have been rallying Miss Wear on her fondness for archery. If I might whisper in your

ear, Miss Leslie, I should say that when you officiate as chaperon to such charming girls, it is well to look after them a little more closely, or they may fix their arrows in something more easily wounded than the bull's eye. Poor Ted has quite lost his heart at last. He follows her about like a shadow. I have had to find fault with him sometimes for raising hopes which he never meant to fulfil; such a wrong thing, you know, for young men to do, but it is evidently a case with him now."

It was the first time I had heard anyone, with the manners and appearance of a lady, discussing at a public luncheon-table matters so purely personal as the disposition of other people's affections, or I might almost say discussing them under any circumstances at all. For we Cove Rossington aborigines, amongst our other old-fashioned prejudices, retained a very strong one against meddling in what did not con-

cern us ; and in particular against meddling with those innocent affections and preferences which, touched by rude hands from without, often cause the bitterest pain to those whose lives they might have made very fair and beautiful. Not that Birdie and Ted Ullathorne, the state of whose hearts was under discussion now by their own mother, were likely to suffer much in the process ; but the disposition it revealed, the want both of self-respect and respect for others, was new and quite strange to me. Miss Fidger was busy chattering away to a neighbour on the other side, so did not hear the opinions advanced.

“But, dear me, do excuse me one moment,” said Mrs. Ullathorne, “there are the Guttridges looking out for me. Horridly vulgar people, you know, but still when one is on a committee one must be all things to all men, and they do give most liberally.”

Away went Mr. Surbiton's sister, not any more to return, since he was safely established at Mrs. Collinson's right hand; and after luncheon Miss Fidger and I were once more left to the loneliness which best befitted us at a pic-nic.

We went to look for Tyne. Mrs. Ullathorne's remarks had had this good effect, that they determined me to keep the girl under my own wing for the rest of the day. We found her chatting merrily enough with a lot of young companions who wanted her to join them in getting up an out-door charade. Mr. Ullathorne, standing close to her, with the easy confidence of a man who has a right to the position, was sketching out a plan of the performances, and suggesting the *rôle* which he and Tyne should assume as hero and heroine.

I was just in time to carry the heroine off, more, I think, to Ted's discomfiture than her own. I could see very well, by

the set of Tyne's lips, and the flash of her eyes, that her merriment was only on the surface. It was the sparkle which is assumed to hide weariness and vexation; but Tyne wore it so well that I daresay none but myself knew it was not real. She was very glad to leave them all, and turn aside with us to our quiet seat on the top of the cliff.

"Oh! Auntie Dora," she said, pulling off her hat, and letting the wind play through her hair, "why didn't you come and fetch me away ever so long ago? I looked out for you, but couldn't see you anywhere."

"Because you told me you didn't want me any more, when you got among the archery people."

And so she had, the saucy girl! and told me it, too, when Ted Ullathorne was standing by, as much as to make the way open for him to attend her instead. Tyne used

to go to the very brink of vexing me sometimes, with those half-coquettish ways of hers, and yet I knew that the time had not yet come for anyone to be so much to her as I was, so I let her have her way.

She tossed her head impatiently.

"I don't know why I wanted to come at all. It's been ever so stupid. I didn't hit the bull's eye once."

"I am very sorry," I said, drily. In truth I was rather glad that Tyne should be out of sorts. "I took it for granted, when you dismissed me, that you were going to have a very good time indeed."

"Good time, indeed!—and I had to spend every bit of it with that stupid Ted Ullathorne. He has been making puns and jokes until I scarcely know how to string three words together properly. I hate a man who is always composing puns!"

"Well, Tyne, I can only say you should

not make your society so agreeable to people when you do not really care for them."

Tyne's eyes flashed, but the tears in them told me I must not go any farther.

"There you are again, Auntie Dora! How can I help it? I can't turn myself into a muff, and shut up, and tell people I don't want to be talked to. Did you do in that way when you were a girl?"

"Miss Fidger," said I, "what did I do when I was a girl?"

"I don't remember, my dear, exactly, except that you always wore brown merino frocks, and replied, when you were asked to do anything—'If my Aunt Lois will let me.' You were a very excellent young person, Dora."

"There, Tyne. The moral of which is, if you want to be your own mistress at forty, obey those that have the rule over you at twenty. Result given—myself."

But I took Tyne's hand into mine and held it fast, and we felt that all was right between us. These little puffs of waywardness never did more than blind our eyes for a moment or two.

When we got to our old seat again, she curled herself up under a clump of bracken at a little distance from me, and spoke scarcely another word. I was rather glad she was vexed; it was ten times better than if she had had a perfectly happy, satisfactory morning with that prince of coxcombs, Ted Ullathorne. I did not try to bring her out of her silence. Tyne's own thoughts were generally a wholesome medicine for her when she had been betrayed into either folly or temper. She just crouched there with her elbows on her knees, and her chin in the palms of her hands; and if I did now and then turn to look at her, I generally found her eyes fixed on a piece of scarlet, much bigger

than a geranium leaf now, which, with something in shape and appearance like a man, was winding down from the opposite side of the ravine, about a quarter of a mile away.

Our seat was on the brink of the grip, but on the side where it was shelving and shallow, with pretty little breaks and heathery slopes, and patches of fern and grass, leading down to the brook, whose bubble we could hear mingling with the deep undertone of the waves, far below. On the other side the cliffs were much more precipitous, though occasionally there were shelving banks there too, richly covered with moss and wild-flowers, blossoming gorse and the short stunted foliage of the bilberry.

Mrs. Ullathorne had taken care that Mr. Surbiton should not trouble us again, so Miss Fidger and I were left to our own resources, Tyne brooding over her own

thoughts, counting for nothing in the way of company. We were having a talk about the pleasant old times, before wealth, fashion, and display were known amongst us; when we used to come on the top of the lumbering old coach, clad in our coarsest, most untearable dresses, with hampers of pigeon-pie and bottles of the mildest sherry, to take our simple pleasure here in this very spot, where now a couple of hundreds of stylishly-dressed people, in all the colours of the rainbow, were dancing and flirting and displaying themselves to the sunshine, in such a guise as would have seemed to us little short of immodest, twenty years before.

One forgets how the time goes when one is comparing the old times with the new—when the life which, with all its simplicity, was so sweet, is set side by side with one out of which we have been dropped as seedy and old-fashioned. Miss Fidger and

I were remembering ourselves as few in Cove Rossington, except my father and old Joe Rollekens, remembered us; and with the old selves came back the old friends, the old hopes, the old gladnesses, that had been dead so many a year.

We might have been talking for a few minutes; we might have been talking for an hour, when, hearing a sharp catching breath from under the bracken clump, I turned and saw Tyne on her hands and knees staring down into the ravine.

I hope I shall never again see, on any human face, such an expression of agony and horror as was upon hers then. Before I could say a word to her, she sprang down among the bushes, leaped from knoll to knoll, her glazed hat flashing now here, now there, farther and farther down the ravine, till she reached the little brook, which she cleared with a single bound, and then began to climb the other side.

At the same time a succession of piercing shrieks frightened all the sea-gulls and jack-daws from their holes amongst the rocks. Looking in the direction whence they came, we saw Birdie Ullathorne careering along down the cliff path towards the tent, swinging her hands and screaming as though all the birds in the British empire were struggling for expression in her throat.

CHAPTER XVII.

“**W**HAT *can* be the matter?” said Miss Fidger, as the screams waxed louder and louder, until the people below heard, and came trooping up the cliff.

“I don’t know,” I said. “Tyne shot like an arrow into the ravine just now, looking as if she had seen something very dreadful.”

And then it flashed into my mind.

“Mr. Elphinston has fallen over the cliff. He was there with Birdie a moment ago, and now she is running down shrieking without him. Heavens! what shall we do?”

What indeed? We both hurried to the

edge of the ravine. There was Tyne already on the other side. The girl must have scrambled like a goat up the sloping banks, and swung herself up or down as it happened, from shrub to shrub, to reach so soon the place where we saw her. We could do nothing but wait and wonder and hold our breath in terrible suspense. To follow where she had gone was impossible for us, even if we could have been of any use when we got there. I asked Miss Fidger to go along as fast as she could after Birdie, and find out what really was the matter, whilst I staid to see what had become of Tyne.

By-and-by she appeared, making a flying leap over the brook. Then catching hold of the branches, she dragged herself up, and half crept, half scrambled back again to where she had first jumped down.

"He is all right," she said carelessly, giving herself a general shake of adjust-

ment, which she very much needed. "I thought he had fallen right over the precipice, but there was a shelving place underneath, which caught him and he only got bruised."

"And where is he? Have you left him?"

"Yes, there was nothing to do. He is coming up after me."

And so he was, looking rather ruffled and tumbled and pale, but in no other way the worse for what might so easily have been a death fall.

"Mr. Elphinston," I said, "what a fright you have given us! Birdie Ullathorne has gone to tell everyone that you are killed."

"And so I might have been," he said very quietly. "It was stupid of me to go so near the edge, but I did not know how loose and crumbling the earth is just there. Are *you* all right, Miss Wear? I saw you hurrying down across the ravine, and I was

sure you were in much greater danger than myself."

Tyne, who had come round to the other side of me, away from Mr. Elphinston, only gave herself one of her little impatient flings.

"Oh! yes. Pray don't trouble yourself about me. You had better go as quickly as possible and show yourself to the rest of the people. I daresay they are under the impression that you have been reduced to a shapeless mass of remains."

"Then they will find out their mistake soon enough. I want to be quite sure that you are not hurt. If you have done yourself no worse harm, you must at any rate be a mass of scratches, just as I might have been a mass of remains."

"I am nothing of the sort," she answered, petulantly. "I am all right, if you will only let me alone. Here they come. Now, Mr. Elphinston, do rise to the occasion."

For the people were hurrying towards us, Birdie's red scarf in the foreground. As they saw Mr. Elphinston leisurely walking along, just as if nothing had happened, a general chorus of congratulations arose.

"Oh! you unfortunate man, we thought you were dead," cried Mrs. Ullathorne, who was one of the first. "Birdie said you had fallen over the cliff and been dashed to pieces. Oh! how grateful the dear child will be! Birdie, darling, Mr. Elphinston lives!"

Birdie, with another scream, flung herself into his arms, and went into violent hysterics. The ladies crowded round her with fans, smelling-bottles, and pocket-handkerchiefs. Tyne stood apart, looking supremely contemptuous.

"Poor darling!" they said; "you know it must have been such a terrible shock, and her nerves always so delicate. Do you

feel better now, dear? Do you think you could manage to get back again to the tent?"

Birdie looked pathetically round on the circle of sympathising faces, and allowed herself to be half led, half carried down to the entrance of the tent, where a couch was improvised for her upon the heather, and, wrapped in shawls and plaids, she made quite a pretty object. It must indeed have been a very great shock to her, only I wish she had not made so much noise about it.

After that we lost sight of Mr. Elphinston. Everybody was asking about him, but nobody could tell where he was. I think he did not care for the fuss that was made about his narrow escape. The little excitement soon passed over. The people dispersed to their various amusements as before, only a knot of gentlemen and ladies remaining round Birdie, who, in

consideration of the screaming and the hysterics, was fairly entitled to be behaved to as the heroine of the day.

Tyne and I kept together, apart from the rest. She was in one of her petulant moods. She would not let me speak a word of pity or inquiry, but I could see that she was trembling and trying to keep down a great inward excitement. By-and-by, when we had been mooning up and down in this unsatisfactory way for more than half an hour, she said,

"Auntie Dora, are you really enjoying it very much? If not, I wish you would let us go home. I don't see very much in it."

That was just what I saw myself, and I should have liked to propose the going home, too, only I was not sure that Tyne would be satisfied.

"All right," I said, "I am sure I have had quite enough of it. I don't see that

we have done much else to-day except make ourselves uncomfortable."

And finding that we could catch a train, we slipped quietly away, without saying good-bye to anyone but Miss Fidger and Mr. Surbiton, who were having a cosy little chat together on the common, Mrs. Ullathorne being busy on the archery-ground. I am sure that poor man only wanted congenial society and a little wholesome letting alone to make him a very pleasant companion.

When we reached Mrs. Wear's house Tyne went straight up into her own room, leaving me to give the account of the day's proceedings, which I did quite leisurely, knowing that my father would not expect me home for another three hours at the very earliest. When I went to bid Tyne good-bye, I found her bathing her wrist, which was swollen and covered with scratches. Indeed, how she had managed

to keep it covered up so quietly since her journey into the grip, was more than I could understand.

"Oh! and so this is what you call being all right!" I said, taking the pretty round arm and caressing it. "It is a good thing there are no amateur concerts going on just now, for you and short sleeves will have to part company for some time. You child, to say nothing about it!"

Tyne pulled her arm away—as much in petulance as in pain, I believe.

"Don't—it's ever so bad. I suppose I sprained it, or something, for I fell right upon it when I was jumping over the brook. But I didn't want to make a commotion about it. One set of hysterics is quite enough for a pic-nic."

"Poor child! Then I think you should have done it, and had the fussing and the attention, and the sympathy, and all the rest of it. Mr. Elphinston told me he was

quite sure you must have hurt yourself, only you seemed as if you did not want anyone to take any notice of it."

I was going to draw her close to me, for I saw she looked utterly spent and wearied, but she held herself very stiff. Tyne would only be caressed in her own time and way.

"Don't!" she said again. "I hate to have people pitying me. You're a stupid, and I'm a stupid, and everybody is a stupid. I wish we were all dead and done for."

And dropping her head on the arm that was strong enough to bear it, Tyne began to cry. I am sure it was what she had been wanting to do for the last three hours.

CHAPTER XVIII.

YET was it weariness, I wondered, when, having seen the child comfortably settled down for the night, I came back to that best quiet of all—the quiet of my own home? Was it weariness, or pain, or the dreary reaction which must come after any great excitement? Or was it something deeper and less transitory than any of these—the unrest of heart which, once beginning, never ends, except in crowning joy or crowned sorrow? Were Tyne's petulance and peevishness, her alternate flashes of brightness and fits of gloom, signs of a conflict with herself—conflict which proud hearts like hers must

always go through before they come to the best sweetness of life ?

I could not tell. It was not my place to find out. Much 'as I loved Eglantine Wear, closely as her life had grown to mine, I could never have spoken a word to her, or about her, on *that* subject.

It seems to me that, except in the privacy of her own thoughts, no woman has any right to speculate on that most personal of all matters, the disposal of a girl's affections ; still less to make suggestions about it to a third person. The woman who does this rifles the casket of friendship of its most precious jewel, confidence—that jewel which, once taken, is never quite replaced. If her guess has been a right one, what has she discovered but that which, in its own fair time, would have blossomed forth without heralding of hers ? If, in her eagerness to be overwise, she has given the name of love to that

which never won so high, what has she done but open sluices of bitterness, which may one day separate chief friends, and which must hurt her own womanhood more than that into whose personality she has sought to penetrate? Tyne's affairs were hers; my thoughts were mine. The gulf which divided them must be passed by her, if passed at all.

I had been sitting with my father but a very little while, when Mr. Elphinston came home, rather to my surprise, for I had understood from Mrs. Ullathorne that they were intending to stay until quite late, to see the moon rise over the ocean; and the trap which was to bring her party home was not ordered until ten o'clock, so that Mr. Elphinston could not have reached us much before midnight. But he had set off soon after we left, and walked the nine miles home alone.

"I felt as if I wanted a good rousing

walk," he said, "and plenty of my own company. Nothing worries me more than incessant talking to a lot of people that I don't care for. And then, you know, I went and looked at the place where I slipped down, and I found that, if I had happened to lose my footing only a few seconds before, I should have gone sheer down, a couple of hundred feet into the sea. I couldn't go and chatter rubbish after that, and so I came home."

Which was just what I should have expected of him. He would not make a grand public thanksgiving for the "providential escape," as most people would call it, which he had had; but he would say his prayers in solitude none the less earnestly. And I believe John Elphinston was one of those men who think that Providence has as much to do with a man's death as with his life. If he had been allowed to fall that two or three hundred feet into the sea, and so

quietly and suddenly pass the boundary line between this world and the next, it would have been no less God's doing than the love which led him a few steps further on, and saved him to us. Only we have such a way of looking at things [just as they touch ourselves.

"I was a little anxious too," he continued, "when Miss Fidger told me you and Miss Wear had gone home. I was afraid she might have been hurt, though she would not own it. I don't see how anyone could possibly get down that ravine as quickly as she did, without a terrible lot of bruises and scratches."

"And poor Tyne didn't get down without them either," I said; and then I told him about her sprained and cut wrist. About nothing else, though. Tyne's petulance and tears were not for him to know."

"The brave girl! And to think of her keeping up so quietly, without ever saying

a word, whilst that stupid Miss Ullathorne screeched and screamed and brought everybody out to see what was the matter."

"It is Tyne's way to be quiet," I said, and said no more.

He wanted to go at once and inquire after her, but I told him he had much better stay where he was, because, as he was not supposed to be at home, no such attention would be required of him; and I knew, too, that, if Tyne wanted to see him at all, she would be much more likely to enjoy his visit after she had had a good night's rest. But he could not rest until he had gone and left a message for her.

I was glad I had persuaded him to defer his call until the next morning, for whilst he was away Mrs. Ullathorne came. They were afraid, she explained, that as he had left so suddenly the day before, without taking leave of anyone, he had felt some ill effects from his fall; and I must own to

a little malevolent satisfaction in being able to tell her that he came back to us simply because he was tired of having to talk to people that he did not care about.

Mrs. Ullathorne floated over my evil intentions as gracefully as possible. I believe she thought I was a very unsanctified woman, and that her patience in bearing with me was little short of angelic. She always did provoke me to run up against her, in some way or other. She was rather hurt this morning, though—not by me, but by Mr. Elphinston, and allowed it to be seen.

“Birdie felt it a little, poor darling! that he did not come to inquire after her before he left the ground. You know it had been such a dreadful shock to her, and her behaviour was very heroic. I wonder she did not become paralysed with fright upon the spot, instead of hurrying to us in that splendidly self-forgetful way ;

and I do think it was the least he could have done to remain with her during the rest of the day."

I suggested that perhaps the danger might have given *him* a slight shock too, and made him wish to be perfectly quiet.

"Ah! well, perhaps it might, though really he took it with remarkable coolness. But I do think, under any circumstances, Birdie demanded a little more consideration, especially as he had paid her so much attention during the day—indeed, I may say quite monopolised her, poor fellow! You see, he is evidently not accustomed to the ways of society, and scarcely understands the construction which people will put upon his attentions."

I felt that neither the attentions nor the constructions were any affair of mine, and so I contented myself with inquiring after Birdie's health. Did she find herself quite recovered from the excitement, and was

she able to enjoy the moonlight and the ride home?

"Oh! yes, thank you. Everybody was charmingly kind to her, and of course I would not let her have the least exertion for the remainder of the day. Perhaps it was as well that Mr. Elphinston went away, or he might have felt a little bit jealous at the great attention which the rest of the people paid her. It was really quite touching to see their kindness and sympathy. Only, you know, she did just feel his going away at first, and perhaps you wouldn't mind telling him. Not that I wish him to think Birdie is in the least offended, for she is not one to cherish a feeling of that kind; but you understand, don't you? I have no doubt he will very soon make it all right with her."

And Mrs. Ullathorne meandered elegantly out of the room, leaving me to my own reflections.

I don't know whether Mr. Elphinston's visit to Hollycote was a pleasant one or not, for I saw very little of him all that day, and when I went to inquire after Tyne she was not in a talking mood. She was one of those girls who require a great deal of letting alone. If she was wilful, it was no use petting her back to reason. If she was wayward, a kiss would not set her straight again. Tender silence, which to some might seem like neglect, was Tyne's best medicine. She appreciated sympathy which kept itself quiet more than most people.

But I could not help noticing a strange sort of wistfulness which mingled with her irritability and petulance now. Since these last few days she had quite lost the gay, easy *abandon* of her manners, and that sort of reserve which would by-and-by soften into dignity was coming over her. I think Tyne felt she was on the brink of

a great change, and she scarcely dared trust herself to a future of which she knew not anything.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUT a week after that pic-nic another very curious thing came to pass, which I must put down before I go on with Tyne's affairs.

Mr. Surbiton had come to our house twice during that week, professedly to play backgammon with my father ; but the games made little progress, neither did anything else but a great disposition to silence on the part of us all. I don't know how it was, but nothing that we talked about seemed as if it could keep itself going for more than a minute or two ; then something else had to be started, which

anon disappeared in the same unsatisfactory manner.

At last Mr. Surbiton revealed the object of his visits, which was to suggest my taking Mrs. Ullathorne's place as head of his household.

I don't think I ever quite realised all that he meant by it, or the compliment he paid me, or the great change which it might have made in my life, not to mention his own. I was so anchored now in the quietness of my own home and my own thoughts, that this circumstance scarcely ruffled my peace at all, or disturbed that little residuum of vanity which is to be found at the bottom of every woman's heart, let her be as plain or ill-favoured as she may.

And I had not to endure very long that pang of regret with which any womanly woman sends away the man who has placed his happiness in her keeping; for the day

week after I had declined Mr. Surbiton's proposals, dear little Miss Fidger came to tell me, in the strictest confidence, that she had accepted them.

I knew something very unusual must have happened, by the important way in which, after chatting for awhile with my father, she trotted me out of the room, and pointed mysteriously to the door of the library, as if to intimate that the object of her visit required a private interview. I understood the hint. We ensconced ourselves comfortably, the two of us, in my father's great reading-chair, and she told me all about it.

"Such a change for me now, isn't it, my dear?" she said, when she had described her prospects, "and the very last thing I expected to result from the intimacy, when Mrs. Ullathorne was so very anxious for us to be friendly, that evening, you remember, when they first came to tea, and Gilbert

ran over from Shagmouth to tell me of his engagement."

"I daresay it was the very last thing Mrs. Ullathorne thought of, too," I remarked, "for she seemed to think her brother was so exceedingly happy in his domestic arrangements that it would be the height of folly to think of changing them. She has often told me how very, very comfortable they all were together."

"She said so to you, did she, my dear? And she has said the same thing to myself, over and over again, though really why she should try to impress it upon me so strongly, I never could find out, for I am sure Mr. Surbiton's domestic arrangements were never of the least importance to me, until yesterday morning, when he asked me if I should have any objection to superintending them myself. However, it is all settled now, and very comfortable I feel about it, and I hope dear Mr. Surbiton and

all the family will feel that it is for the best. He told me he had been thinking of a change for some time past."

How comical it all seemed ! Evidently the good man had had us both upon his mind, to say nothing of his heart, at the same time, and it was simply a matter of circumstance which of us finally accepted the position. I was very glad for Miss Fidger, as well as for himself, that the lot had fallen into her lap ; for in spite of her grey curls and crowsfooted face, she was far, far younger in temperament and disposition at fifty, than I should be at forty, and would make anyone a much more active, wide-awake, vivacious little partner for life.

But whilst I was able to congratulate dear Mr. Surbiton with all my heart, I was not by any means sure of his sister's opinion on the subject, and I ventured to ask whether she had been informed of the

proposed arrangement. I could not call it anything but an "arrangement," for all romance was as completely cleared away from it as the scum from my poor Aunt Lois's most carefully prepared currant jelly, leaving only absolute, clarified matter of fact.

"Well, no, my dear Miss Dora, and between ourselves I am by no means certain that Mrs. Ullathorne will look upon it as a matter for congratulation. You see, though I admire her very much, and have always been on the best possible terms with her, still it is plain enough that, if the choosing of her brother's wife had been in her hands, he would never have had one chosen for him at all, unless a husband had first been chosen for herself. Because, you see, having been with him so long, she naturally considered herself established for life, and now everything is so different. I should not wonder if she were to remove from the place finally."

Finally, perhaps. But for my own part I did not think she would do it until she saw whether Birdie was likely to flutter into a clerical nest on her own account. However, I held my peace, being of opinion that silence, like a low voice, is an excellent thing in woman.

“Still, you know, my dear,” continued Miss Fidger, “it is not what Mrs. Ullathorne thinks, but what Mr. Surbiton and I think, that is the question now, and we have decided matters for ourselves.”

I was very glad she could take such independent ground. I hoped with all my heart that she would be able to keep it. But I was quite sure of this, that, if Mrs. Ullathorne allowed her own convenience to be put second to that of anyone else, it would be the first time in her life she had done such a thing.

“And I do think,” said Miss Fidger, with an emphatic little movement of herself

in as much room as I could give her, for we were a little bit squeezed in my father's chair—"I do think we have both of us done a very wise thing."

So did I. At least I was quite sure Mr. Surbiton had done a very wise thing. Whether Miss Fidger, with her splendid ability for self-amusement, her pleasant, never-wearied activity, her honey-bee-like power of skimming over the thorns and flowers of life, avoiding the one and gathering store of sweetness out of the other, had done an equally wise thing in resigning her independence, and taking upon herself the charge of a not very self-helpful man, remained to be proved. But her following observation seemed to set that straight.

"You see, my dear," she said, "I shall have some one now to talk to, and think about, and manage for. You have no notion what a troublesome thing it is to

contrive nice little dinners for only yourself and a servant. How tired I have become during the last five and twenty years of steaks and mutton chops ! but now I see an end of that difficulty. And a pleasant addition to my income too, so that I shall be able to see a little more company."

"And put eggs in your puddings again," I suggested.

"Just what I was going to say myself, my dear ; put eggs in my puddings again, and get my best damask tablecloths out a little more frequently, and that lovely china tea-service of poor grandmamma's, which I never do more than look at in the cupboard now, because I haven't a teapot which would bear bringing within half a mile of it. I can't endure electro-plate, you know, with the real thing in china. And just think of our evenings together. Why, I shall be able to chatter away to my very heart's content, a thing I have never

done since I came of age, unless some one happened to come and stop with me for a day or two. And so different from a lodger, you know, which was what Gilbert proposed to me when I said something about being so lonely."

"Well, yes," I replied, "if one *must* make the choice. Only the lodger can be dismissed at a week's notice; and have you decided how much notice you will either of you require?"

"Ah! now, Dora, my dear, you are laughing at me, just because I don't make it a matter of sentiment and sympathy, and hearts beating in unison, and all that sort of thing, which never was in my line, and never will be. I think life, at my time and Mr. Surbiton's, is just as useful without it. Not that it isn't a very pretty thing to have forget-me-nots, and locks of hair, and old letters laid up in writing desks, but mine never held anything of the sort."

I told her most truly that mine didn't either.

"No, I don't suppose it does. Except that poor Mr. Somebody, whose wife's death we read by accident in my paper, I never saw anybody in this house who seemed to have come with any such purpose ; and then, as you say, the small-pox and the loss of the property coming, and your Aunt Lois's death, and all the rest of it, seemed to settle you down, until now nobody would ever think you had ever been anything else but what you are—the best daughter in the world to the grandest old father."

Miss Fidger might have ended the sentence differently. Indeed I was quite expecting allusions not by any means so complimentary, and perhaps more entirely applicable. But when did that dear, good little lady ever say anything, either of set purpose or by accident, that could so much

as offend a fly? And she went chatting on in her bright, pleasant way—

“So, as I said, you know, we agreed to put romance and sentiment on one side, and as soon as the important question was settled, I told him what plate and linen I had, so that he should not go to any needless expense in furnishing a new house; and about the china too, and said that the dearest wish of my heart was a teapot worthy of it; not that I set my affections on material objects to a sinful extent, but only for everything to be in harmony. And then I told him what pieces of furniture I should like to keep, and the dear old things that belonged to my poor mother, and I think I may say we saw eye to eye in everything. Dora, he is a man in a thousand for contentedness, and being willing to give up his own way.”

“The fruits of good education and experience,” I replied, knowing that anyone

who lived with Mrs. Ullathorne must have a fine training in unselfishness.

Soon after that Miss Fidger took her departure, and I was left to my own meditations.

I sat thinking for a long long time over what she had told me, and the manner in which she had told it. I rambled into a curious speculation thereupon. I wondered what became of our past selves when we had done with them. There must have been a time—say thirty years before—when Miss Fidger's dancing grey curls were of softest yellow gold, and the cheerful wrinkled face smooth with the roundness and bloom of youth; when, prosaic, practical, matter-of-fact as she was now, she must have had something better to talk about in the very moment of new-found happiness, than plate and linen, and a silver teapot to match her best china. And if so, what had become of that part

of her? Had some subtle spiritual chemistry, analogous to that which in the material world transmutes youth to age and golden curls to grey, absorbs particles and uses them up in fresh combinations, gradually decomposed the elements of her earlier mental self; and had these elements been used up to make somebody else, whilst the *débris* of other characters, particles which had unconsciously fallen away from them, had been absorbed into herself and come out again in this new development?

And I wondered whether in years to come I should ever change quite so much as Miss Fidger must have changed; whether so much of my old self could possibly pass away from me, so much of another, quite foreign, take its place and belong to me as my own. I thought not. Through all my life I had never let my past slip from me. It was held in the possession of constant, faith-

ful memory. Something told me that, spite my thickly coming grey hairs, and falling cheeks, and white scarred face, the soul which could be touched by none of these things kept its youth, and, gaining year by year, let drop nothing that it had once attained. I knew myself still, through all that had grown up since, as the Dora Leslie of those old, far back days. I could still enjoy, still suffer as keenly, though life gave no place now for the enjoyment or the suffering. I felt like a tree which keeps its concentric rings of growth, year by year, within the same bark; and not a plant, which, pushing away from its earlier leaves, lets them lie withering at its root.

And the end of my meditations was this: that if Ræ Morrison ever could come back to me—which of course was an impossibility; I always fenced in my fancies with that stern admonition—we should find something else to talk about than linen and china.

CHAPTER XX.

I COULD not help feeling very glad about that change in Mr. Surbiton's domestic arrangements, if only for the reason that it might possibly lead, by-and-by, to Mrs. Ullathorne's departure from Cove Rossington. She had often complained of the climate as being too cold for her. She had longed for Florence or Mentone, or the south of England, and said that she only staid with her brother at all, because they were so very much attached to each other, and he would be so terribly lost without her. So that now she was at liberty to go where she liked, without any sacrifice of sisterly duty.

I was beginning to distrust that woman more than ever, though I scarcely knew why. I felt that she had a great power of mischief within her, and very little power of conscience to prevent her from using it. She had evidently set her mind on a match between Birdie and Mr. Elphinston; and if, as was probable enough, he did not see things in exactly the same light, she would not hesitate to compensate herself for the disappointment by secretly working against him.

I had always connected her with the opinions which Mr. Collinson had expressed about Mr. Elphinston's sermons. She could talk very beautifully about the necessity of clearness in doctrine, and she could look as grave as the gravest when the gospel trumpet did not give what she considered a sufficiently certain sound. And though her views were opposed to those of Mr. Collinson; and though she could upon oc-

casion quarrel with him pleasantly for his attachment to the old landmarks, still, upon other occasions, such as that of coalition against a common enemy, she could sink her differences, and join hands in what Mr. Collinson would consider conscientious opposition to dangerous pulpit influence. Therefore, I for one would have given my hearty good wishes for success in some distant sphere.

For many days after the pic-nic I saw very little of Tyne—very little, I mean, in our usual friendly way. I used to go in twice a week for afternoon readings with her and Mrs. Wear, and everything was perfectly pleasant ; but a certain impalpable veil of reserve had arisen between us, which I felt I had no right to put aside. Hitherto I believe she had taken me into every thought of her heart. There were chambers in mine which she had never looked into ; there were none in hers, I

think, to which I was quite a stranger. Now it was no longer so. She was beginning to have a life which I could not share with her.

I did not complain about this. It was quite right it should be so. I was only learning once more what I had already learned: that we must be content to be to our friends what they need, not what we wish; to fill such place as we can for a time, and then, when the time is over, quietly step aside, with no hurt or wounded or martyred air, to let a better give with more generous hand what is no longer ours.

And Tyne was a girl out of whom confidence could never be forced. The least impatient touch upon the latch of her heart closed it firmly against the intruder. I never knew a grown-up woman who had more of that righteous self-respect which will not bear questioning or meddling than Eglantine

Wear. And if, by chance or accident, more of herself was revealed to others than she wished, the revelation was sure to be followed by unusual constraint, a proud shyness which was ashamed of having shown so much. I understood it now, and used to leave her to herself when these moods came upon her. I knew by-and-by the sun would shine out again, and all be bright between us. And come what might, Tyne and I must always be friends. There was that in each of us which could never quite lose its hold upon the other.

She did not mention the pic-nic to me, nor Mr. Elphinston's call. Except for Mrs. Wear, I should not have known that he went to the house at all. She would speak of him sometimes with a sort of careless defiance, as she might of one who had done her some wrong. Or a quiet, biting little bit of satire would unconsciously reveal how much hold he had taken upon her

—for Tyne was never satirical, except where she was moved very deeply. But she never asked me any questions about him; and if I had not kept his study bright with flowers, I think none others would have found their way to it through all those late Summer months.

She did not meet John Elphinston again at our house until the end of October, and then she came one evening when he was supposed to have an engagement in the town. But, as it happened, he had put it off—whether on her account or not, I never knew; and so it chanced that they had to spend some hours together. I could see then how much her manner had changed to him. She was no longer daringly wilful or as daringly petulant. I think she felt a strong hand upon her, and loved to feel it, yet was too proud to own it there, and even tried to fling it away. Some one was beginning to be more master of her than

she was of herself. She had quite lost—at least with John Elphinston—the ease and self-possession which sat so pleasantly upon her when she felt that she was “making a difference.”

I could see it all plainly enough in the glass of my own girlish experience. I had never felt so close to Tyne as that night, though neither word nor look nor tone might have leave to show it. She was drawing nearer and nearer to the Gate Beautiful, which, long ago, I had looked through, but never passed. And I hoped for her that she might find entrance there, and be at rest, instead of finding rest, where it had been laid up for me, through the Gate Sorrow, which, though it be sometimes a Gate Beautiful too, is so straight and narrow.

John Elphinston stayed with us all the evening, not seeming to want any excuse for going away. I noticed a difference in

him too. There was no longer any boyish embarrassment in his manner towards Tyne. As she had taken on a strange new quietness and humility, so he had laid aside his diffidence, and could move her now at his will. It was he who was making the difference, not Tyne any more. His was the stronger nature, to which hers must of right yield.

I was glad of this, for I wanted Tyne to care for him; and I knew that a woman, especially a woman like her, never cares for a man who is afraid of her. There are some women who begin by ruling, and go on by ruling all their lives; but such women rarely marry men who are good for anything, and miss the pleasantest drop in the cup of existence. John Elphinston was a man whose nature, in its freeness and fulness and strength, could rule any woman's; but there was a want of self-appreciation on the social side of him.

The world had not acknowledged him as one of its masters, and he had not conceit enough to vault into the saddle before he had won his spurs. Ted Ullathorne, thrice plucked, but of exquisite address, and carrying all his knowledge pleasantly scattered about on the top of him, could make a fifty times better figure in society.

I think Tyne saw this faulty side of John Elphinston's character before she saw the other, stronger side. She had ridiculed him at first as a "stupid"—a man who could not hold his own under awkward circumstances. That had given her behaviour towards him a touch almost of patronising independence. Then she had found there were treasures of masterful strength in him which could reach and bind even herself, and she resented the firm hand which his opinions, his influence, laid upon her. That made her wilful and petulant, besides being ashamed of herself

for having misunderstood him at first. The balance of power was becoming more fairly adjusted between them now. He was taking his own place as the one to be obeyed; she was taking hers as the one to yield. A new place, indeed, for Tyne; and she seemed as much embarrassed in it as John Elphinston had done in his at first. But I felt sure now that all would come right.

How well I remember that evening! I had such an impression of something sad and beautiful at hand—sad for myself, beautiful for others. The two friends I loved most were passing away from me into each other, and would never be quite the same again in their nearness to me. By-and-by it would come back to the old story—"my father and I"—none but just our two selves.

He was busy with his books in his own special recess of the room. He had a

curious power of abstraction, never needing solitude or silence to carry on any train of thought. Sometimes he would look round to us, join for a few moments in anything we happened to be talking about, then turn again to his own world of speculation, and labour there with a clearness and freedom of brain which age seemed to intensify instead of diminishing. His mind had an everlasting youth and freshness about it, the result, I suppose, of the perfectly simple and truthful life which he had led.

We were all of us rather quiet that night. I am sure it was not on account of the brilliance of our conversation that John Elphinston stayed with us. I was too full of remembrance to talk very much. I had gone back to the days of my girlhood, when the life that Tyne was living now was my life; her hopes, her fears, her unrest, mine too.

Outward things helped this vivid realisation of the past. That pleasant old bow-windowed parlour remained just as it had been ever since I could remember. Neither our means nor our wishes enabled us to comply with the modern habit of turning our things out as they became shabby or old-fashioned, and so giving ourselves a fresh set of associations every ten years. Thanks to Lord Rossington, thanks to our own poverty, that dear old room had never been re-fitted. There was still the quite out-of-date strip of brown panelling, reaching about a yard high round the room, with a good broad ledge at the top, which used to make such a capital table for me when Aunt Lois gave me my Wednesday afternoon feasts of lumps of sugar and pieces of seed cake ; and above it the green paint, upon which, when I had grown tall enough, I delighted to draw pictures with a lead pencil, the

more convenient process of scratching it with my finger nails being strictly forbidden, under penalty of going supperless to bed. And there was the Turkey carpet which my father bought when he was married—carpets lasted then half a lifetime, and, like old friends, were loved none the less because they had lost their bloom—a quaint piece of manufacture such as I never see now, with the strangest combinations of colours and shapes, moderately fresh still under sofas and in unused corners, but melting into a general hazy indistinctness where the footprints of forty years had come and gone upon it, Rae Morrison's amongst them. And the paduasoy curtains, good as good could be, after the suns of five and thirty Summers had shone through them, behind which, as a child, I used to hide myself when I had done anything wrong. What a delight it was to me, at eight years old, when the

upper drapery of those curtains had been altered, and a few little bits were spared, to cut the gaily coloured leaves and flowers out, and wet them and stick them with infinite carefulness all over the inside of a wide-mouthed bottle, and then fill the bottle with salt, and set it on my nursery mantelpiece as an ornament! And there was the tall, dignified old bookcase, with its front of brazen lattice work, half concealing, half revealing the big folios, whose lettered backs I stood on tip-toe to spell out when words were as yet a mystery to me. And Aunt Lois's high-backed chair on the right hand of the fireplace, close by the little shelf on which stood her work-basket, with its unfailing scarlet-knitted petticoat or grey-knitted stocking. If Aunt Lois had been sitting there now, she would have seen little change on anything, save the faces which gleamed in the low uncertain firelight. It was all so

unlike, and yet so like ; so near, and yet so far off. But I did not need to ask myself where was the girl heart that beat so quickly and hoped so eagerly then, for I could feel it still unchanged, as the well-remembered objects round me ; calmer now, and looking backward instead of forward, but holding the old life still, and the old joys and the old friends, ready some day, elsewhere if not here, to meet them all again.

I had to rouse myself, as from a dream, when Tyne came to bid me good night. I had forgotten all about her. Most likely she had forgotten all about me.

"I shall go home with Miss Wear," said John Elphinston.

He said it quietly, decidedly, and Tyne never made any opposition. She was not the Tyne I knew of old, at all. She seemed passing out of one phase of existence into another, held in solution as it

were, until the moment for her to crystallize upon something. I had such a curious feeling when I arranged with her just before she went away, to go over to Hollycote next afternoon for our usual reading of the "Faery Queen," and sent some trifling message to Mrs. Wear about wool work, that I was speaking to her of things that were miles and miles away, and she listened and answered as through a mist.

Mr. Elphinston was gone a long time, and when at last he did come back it was only just to say good night to me. Yet as he said it, looking straight into my face, I felt from the happy brightness of his eyes, and something in the strong steady clasp of his hand, he was in the truest, best sense of the word, "at home"; though the home henceforth was not one which needed its light and comfort from me.

He left the rest for Tyne to tell, and she told me it in her usual impetuous fashion

when I went next day for my reading. For, as I was turning over the leaves towards the end of that canto, where Una finds—

“true peace for evermore,
As weather-beaten ship arrives on happy shore,”

Tyne came behind me, and clasping her two hands round me, laid her soft rosy cheek to mine, and said in a whisper, though I could feel her heart beating all the time,

“Auntie Dora, a strange thing has happened to me.”

“What is it, Tyne?”

Tyne slipped round in front of me, and looking up into my face with a half roguish, half tearful smile said,

“That bothering curate!”

I kissed her, and we left “Una” at peace for the rest of the afternoon. But it was no strange thing that had happened to her. As if from the first, those two in their like-

ness and unlikeness, her proud humility, his humble pride, had not belonged to each other ; as if they must not of very necessity meet and make one perfect whole.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT was a good beginning of the long Winter months.

The engagement was to be a secret between our two families, until John Elphinston had completed his first year at Cove Rossington ; and after that they were not to be married until Tyne was two-and-twenty. Besides, one engagement was quite enough to come before the public at a time; and was not Miss Fidger's the topic of every little tea party and muffin worry which took place amongst our circle of friends during that November? Nor was there any shyness and blushing about it.

Miss Fidger accepted her position from the very beginning with the brisk cheeriness which might have been expected of her, trotted arm in arm with Mr. Surbiton to look at suitable houses, or attend sales where handsome pieces of secondhand furniture might be picked up ; chose carpets, looked after their being well made and fitted ; and was as busy, dear little woman ! as a robin picking up sticks and straws for its nest.

She needed all her activity, too, for the engagement was not a very long one, both parties being of an age to know their own minds, and having passed that transition period of youth when pause needs to be made for the development of latent tastes and dispositions. They agreed to be made one before Christmas, after a courtship of exactly two months ; and my good offices were bespoken, not as bridesmaid, for my years placed me beyond the pale of anything

of that sort, but as companion of the bride.

I think Mrs. Ullathorne would have put off the happy day, if possible. Indeed she did try to do so, on the plea of not being able to find a suitable house. Because, as she delicately hinted to Miss Fidger, Birdie's future was so very uncertain just at that time, and if the dear child's prospects did assume a definite form, she herself should withdraw entirely from the position she had hitherto occupied in society, and, betaking herself to a cottage in the south, remain in seclusion for the rest of her days. Birdie's settlement and her dear brother's comfort, she said, had long been her sole motives for going so much into company. Indeed she talked so sweetly about the charms of retirement, that we began to think it possible she might join a sisterhood. And if, as she had made so many sacrifices for her brother, he would sacrifice

his own convenience a little now, by waiting a few months until she could see more clearly into the future, she would cheerfully give up all further claims upon him.

Most likely Mr. Surbiton thought Birdie's prospects too indefinite for his own to depend entirely upon them, and the idea occurred to him that Miss Fidger's neat little cottage would be a very suitable residence for his sister. Nothing could be urged against so reasonable a proposal. The cottage was nicely situated on the sheltered side of the cliff, low-rented, genteel, and quite within the requirements of a widow lady of limited income. Then Mrs. Ullathorne tried to put off a little longer, on the plea of necessary repairs, but the agent refused to do anything of that sort; and at last she was obliged to give in, Birdie's future being still as uncertain as ever.

So the marriage took place, myself offi-

ciating as companion, or whatever else it might be called, in a neat grey silk dress, which did duty during the subsequent wedding festivities, and Mr. and Mrs. Surbiton settled down to the comfort which, I am sure, both of them richly deserved. It was wonderful how his appearance improved after he became a married man. He quite dropped his vague, undecided ways; he walked about as if he knew where he was going, and meant to get there. The same change also took place in his sentences, which went on now to a satisfactory ending, instead of always stopping midway, and turning back again; and on the whole, he developed into a man who could be looked up to with sincere respect. As for Miss Fidger, who could desire any change in her, save that of name? She did, however, gather up a little touch of matronly dignity, and at a dinner or evening-party moved about with

a becoming consciousness of *moire antique* and matrimony which only made me love her more.

I must say I was sorry about Mrs. Ullathorne's occupation of the cottage, having cherished a not unreasonable hope that she would fix her residence at a distance. And it commanded a prospect, too, both of Mrs. Wear's house and our own, so that conclusions might be drawn unfavourable to the keeping of that pleasant secret which we guarded so carefully. However, we exchanged civilities at proper intervals, and kept the surface of politeness unbroken as heretofore.

Then came pleasant days for us at the old house under the cliff—peaceful, quiet days, in which all that was required of us was to be contented. No one knew of Tyne's engagement, except her mother and ourselves. We were spared, for a while, at least, the running fire of gossip and re-

mark which young people under such circumstances generally have to stand as a public salute to their happiness. John Elphinston used always to spend his Saturday evenings at Hollycote. On Mondays Tyne came to me. The rest of the week he studied hard and close, for, in addition to his parish work, he was beginning to write for the press, and had got an engagement on the staff of a good review. This, however, was as much a secret as the engagement itself.

That little touch of bitterness which came over me when I knew that I must stand aside soon passed away. I had long ago learned the lesson which women of my sort must become perfect in before they can hope for much rest or content in life—that of taking the second place. In only one relation, the supreme one of life, has a woman any right to demand that all shall be given to her, or to murmur if

those to whom she has given her own all should be able sooner or later to do without it. I was no longer needful to John Elphinston. Tyne could be happy enough apart from me now. Only to my father, I was his one friend in all the world. And as I looked at the grand head, whitening and bending day by day, though the soul within put on fresh beauty and strength, the thought would come, spite of all my efforts to put it away, that some day he, too, would be able to do without me.

My father and I. How closely we had drawn to each other, though scarcely ever a caress passed between us, or a word was spoken of the deep love which lay so quietly in our hearts. I think I had grown to be more than content, nay, even thankful, for the events which had given us so entirely to each other through all these long afternoon years of life. Whilst I was with him, the chain of my life seemed

unbroken. All my memories of happiness gathered round one home, one hearth, one altar; and I felt that nothing but death could come between us.

I used to think then, and I think now, what a good gift from God is a long unbroken life in one home, amongst the same friends, the same associations. Few things have so deteriorating an effect upon character as continual upheaval and change from place to place. Knowledge of the world, and a certain easy assurance in claiming one's due share of it, such knocking about may give; but it destroys that calm possession of oneself, that reverence for the past, that quiet, thoughtful growth of character which is perhaps more valuable than mere outside knowledge of the world, and which can only come to its true perfection where the outer as well as the inner life has some settled anchorage. Chance, change, fortune, misfortune, a man

must meet and battle with, and they will only do their work in the tempering of his character ; but there is always one green, fresh, tender spot in the heart, a place for its fairest flowers to find shelter, so long as he can come back, after all, to the early home, and see the old faces and sit by the old fireside, and wander amongst the scenes that were the companions of his childhood.

But I am forgetting Tyne.

Love was just the one thing that was wanted to touch her character into perfectness. I did not wonder, looking upon her now, at what Rae Morrison had said to me, meeting me after that year of sweet hoping and dreaming—

“ Why, child, I scarcely knew you again.”

I could see on her young face what I suppose he had seen on mine then, the unconscious putting on of a beauty from within, the unfolding of something which

only the touch of happy love can bring out. Instead of separating us, as I at first thought, Tyne's new interest in life only gave us more entirely to each other. My friendship with her now gave me a sense of perfectness like the putting in of chords to simple notes, the wondrous inexplicable rest of harmony, as distinct from the mere pleasantness of melody.

It was very beautiful to see how those two young lovers adjusted themselves, he steadying into his place of master and ruler, she as naturally taking hers of the one to be guided. I did not know there was so much tender authority about him. I could not have thought there had been such willingness to be led in her. I suppose it was because, as I have said before, they belonged to each other. The colours of their minds so contrasted that each came out in new beauty. Each was the complement of the other, or, subtly inter-

penetrating, formed a new tint, whilst that which they possessed independently retained its own original beauty.

I used to amuse myself sometimes by speculating as to the effect which a character like Birdie's would have had upon John Elphinston, or one like Ted Ullathorne's upon Tyne, had unkindly circumstances forced them together. I thought what these four people might have become ; how the good in them would have withered for lack of companionship, how the worst in each would have come out. I began to wonder whether there is not a chemistry of mind as well as matter, and whether all the misunderstandings and disturbances and commotions one meets with in domestic life, do not arise from certain elements of character having been deposited in the wrong place.

For instance, you take a phial of some thick, muddy fluid—a fluid which is not to

blame for being thick, but is thick simply because it cannot help itself,—you put a few drops of something else into it; the muddy particles precipitate, and in a moment or two all is clear—transparent as the purest water. You might have put other drops in, which, instead of producing any such effect, would have quietly gone down to the bottom, with no result at all; or you might have taken a phial of perfectly clear fluid, and the very drops which precipitated the muddiness in the dirty phial would have made a storm of effervescence in the clear one, and finally burst it in pieces. The simple fact of putting the right drops in the right phial make all the difference.

Perhaps human characters are acted upon in the same way. Perhaps one spirit brought into contact with another might precipitate its follies, and produce clearness where, before, all had been con-

fusion. Perhaps the very same spirit, brought into contact with another spirit, which did not need such treatment, would produce nothing but effervescence and explosion. Perhaps two spirits who have neither affinity nor repulsion come together, and live for a whole life side by side in the same phial, without exercising any influence upon each other for good or evil; whereas the two, if brought into contact with different elements, might have created entirely new combinations of character.

How far these laws of spiritual chemistry may be fixed, and how far people may learn what elements of character in other people will enter into union with their own, producing pleasing combinations, or what, by power of repulsion, would ensure discord and ultimate destruction, would perhaps be an interesting study, and one of much importance to the peace of fami-

lies. John Elphinston and Tyne seemed to have come to a satisfactory conclusion on the subject.

CHAPTER XXII.

THROUGH all these little social changes I had kept up, unbroken, my friendship with Joe Rollekins. He had aged considerably since his wife's death, but the old man's intellect was as keen as ever, and his observation of people, manners, politics, and religion, as shrewd. My father used to say sometimes that Joe would make a capital newspaper editor but for his stubborn straightforwardness, and a way he had of saying just what he thought, whether it agreed with the views of any particular party or not, which would have made him inconvenient at times to shareholders or proprietors.

The Church quarrels were just then beginning, which have gone on with more or less of bitterness ever since. Joe studied them as he studied everything else, and formed his own opinions. I have thought many times since, that, if a wise liberality like his had steered the vessel ecclesiastical, it would never have found its way into the troubled waters where it rocks so dangerously now. A sail taken down as he would have taken it down, before too strong a wind; a little turn of the rudder to leeward, a port-hole closed just in time to turn the wave which was coming on, a standard boldly hoisted topmast high, to tell the enemy whose ship rode proudly by, instead of lowering that standard for fear of attack,—and she might have been making for port more safely now.

I must put down here a conversation which I had with him a few weeks after his wife's death. Always at that time of

the year we had a sermon preached in Cove Rossington church for some society—I forget now what it was,—in which our own rector, Mr. Dewtrie, took particular interest; and this sermon was preached by a friend of his—Mr. Wrighton,—from Shagmouth Port. Mr. Wrighton preached it, as usual, this year, and Mr. Elphinston went over to Shagmouth Port, to take the duty there.

Mr. Wrighton was a man of Mr. Collinson's type of mind, but of different theological views. He had great earnestness, which flowed, like Mr. Collinson's, in a channel deep in proportion to its narrowness. In Charles the First's time he would have been an Archbishop Laud; but, Archbishop Lauds not being possible now, he was, instead, a staunch, strict, rigorous, and uncompromising upholder of ecclesiastical authority against the claims of individual conscience, and a teacher of un-

questioning submission to the rules and rubrics of the Church, which, in his opinion, were of equal weight with the laws of the land, and required an obedience as entire.

Joe Rollekins had never heard teaching like that, and it set him thinking. Thinking and reading too. He borrowed, one after another, all the church books out of my father's library, and read what he could on both sides of the question in the papers at the Cove Rossington Institute. His mind was full of the subject when I went to see him, two or three weeks after Mr. Wrighton's sermon, and he seemed as if he wanted some one to talk himself out to. I served the purpose of a safety-valve for the deliverance of his opinions, though my knowledge of Church matters was not sufficient to enable me to answer one of his arguments, even if my common sense had led me to question them, which I cannot say it did.

"Not, Miss Dora, as I'm going again' the Church;" and Joe laid his big brown hand on the leather-covered prayer-book out of which he and his father before him had said their prayers for many a year, kneeling in one of the little back pews behind the font. "It's what I was brought up to, and I've stuck to it, man and boy, this more'n seventy year—ay, and mean to stick to it to the end, for there's nothing no better ever I heard tell on to stick to."

So far so good. I thought just the same myself. My fondness for old things—things round which my early associations gathered, and which my father had loved—was a deep-lying principle in my life.

"But," continued Joe, "a lad may be as good a son as ever stepped, and yet, if he sees his mother sitting over near-hand a fire, it isn't nothing against him when he

tells her she'd best move her chair a bit back. Because it stands to reason the fire will have its own, let your mother be as good as she may."

I was compelled to acknowledge the force of Joe's argument; and the old man, seeing I was disposed to listen, went eagerly on, for he seemed to have a weight of thoughts and opinions upon his mind which he wanted to thrust out into the fresh air of speech.

"It's here, Miss Dora. I've been studying and studying over it ever since that there gentleman's sermon, and I've come to this way of thinking at last. You can't make anything as 'll hold out past its time; and whatever's got a bit of life in it can't be kep' still; you must give it room to kick and grow, and find its strength, and know how big it wants to be."

That also was true enough. Quiet child as I had been under my aunt Lois's train-

ing, did not the tucks require to be taken out of my brown frocks from time to time, and did not the frocks themselves want adjusting to my increasing girth of waist and arm, until the good aunt was forced to buy me entirely new ones ?

“Now,” said Joe, “this gentleman as preached when Mr. Elphinston was off at Shagmouth Port told us a deal that I’d never heard tell on before. He said we were going back from the good old prayer-book times, and the ways of our forefathers, because we didn’t have morning and evening prayers said in the church, and go to ’em as regular as we did to our meals. And he said if we looked in our books we should find it there about a bell being tolled for the people to hear and come. So I looked it out afore I sat me down to my dinner.”

“So did I, Joe, and I can tell you exactly what it said :

“‘All priests and deacons are to say daily

the morning and evening prayer; either privately or openly, and the curate that ministereth in every parish church shall cause a bell to be tolled thereunto, a convenient time before he begin, that the people may come to hear God's word and to pray with him.'"

"Yes, Miss Dora, them's the very words. And then I stirred about to find how long ago they were written, but it didn't say in the prayer book, and I had to come to your father to help me, Mr. Elphinston being always so throng while I don't see any need for me to bother him; and your father told me it was a matter of three hundred years back, or thereabouts. I can't tell for certain now whether he said Queen Elizabeth or King Edward, but it don't make much odds which."

I could not see how Joe was going to bring this round to help his argument, but his next words threw a little more light on the subject.

“Now, Miss Dora,” he said, “it stands to reason at that time of day, if folks wanted to know the blessed Scriptures at all, they must go to the church to hear ’em read, for not five on ’em out of a hundred could get a Bible for themselves, and maybe not one out of the five could read it when he’d got it ; and so the church was the only place where they could hear ought good, and plenty reason they had to go to it twice a day. But things is different now, and every man as has a bit of sense can read for himself and study for himself. Why, Miss Dora, my poor Betsy and me had our chapter reg’lar of a night and morning, and a bit of prayer after it, and there come a blessing just as much as if we’d gone to the church for it. And it seems to me, so long as folks don’t forget the assembling of themselves together of a Sunday, which I hope they never will while we’ve got a man like Mr. Elphinston to teach us, no-

body had ought to lay hard upon them for stopping at home the rest of the week, particular when they do a bit of reading for themselves between whiles."

I could not find anything to urge against Joe's position, and he went on—

"I think, Miss Dora, from what I read in the papers, and what that gentleman said about sticking to the old ways and the old rules, they're over-feared to make a step forward. Now I don't see myself why the Church shouldn't move on as well as everything else."

I ventured to suggest, in a blind, groping sort of way, that in the Christian religion we had already perfect truth, which needed no further development.

"Yes, Miss Dora, but you want it putting in a new way as folks get farther on, and you've no right to say to them that if they don't take it in your way they shan't have it at all. You can't keep things the

same, try as you will. You must go on. Now when I was laid up with my foot as was took off, your father lent me the History of England, and I come to the times of William the Conqueror, when there was a bell rung at eight o'clock for all the people to put their fires out. They ring it yet at Shagmouth, but I never knew what it meant while I read your father's book. And a good thing enough, maybe, in their days, when they rose early and worked hard, and lights not to call so cheap as what they are now. But, Miss Dora, though I know my duty to my Queen and country as well as any man alive, and would fight on my stumps for 'em both any day, if need come, yet I'd like to see either of 'em try it on with me to make me put my fire out before I'd a mind to. The people of this land has got past being kept under like that, and kings and queens are wiser now than to try it on again with them."

"Yes, Joe," I said, "but I don't see what that has to do with the Church. She doesn't want us to put our lights out at eight o'clock."

"Wait a bit, Miss Dora, and you'll see what I'm coming to. Now, them as governs England has found out that what did for her eight hundred years ago won't do for her now; and so they don't try to keep her to it. And I don't see why them as settles the religion of a country shouldn't leave room to widen out, same as them that settles its laws. Now, as near as I can tell, Mr. Wrighton wants us to keep to the old tracks of three hundred years ago, when people had neither Bibles to read nor wit to read them, and when they knew nothing of religion but what they could learn at church. Why, bless you, Miss Dora, if Parliament had never moved on an inch since Queen Elizabeth's time, where should we all have been? And

why shouldn't the Church laws move on too?"

I saw what Joe was driving at now, and it seemed to me that truth was on his side, though that he in his fishing-boat should have found it, and Mr. Wrighton in his book-lined study should have missed it, seemed strange enough. But he seemed more anxious to say what he had to say than to know whether I believed it or not. I think the subject had been working in his mind until it possessed him so thoroughly that, not being able to give his thoughts shape in writing, he would have spoken them to the empty room, if no one had been there to hear. I never heard him begin and go on with such steady, persistent earnestness.

"It's just here, Miss Dora, if you'll have patience with me a little longer; but I've been studying this here while I don't feel as if I could keep it to myself; and now

poor Betsy's gone, there's no one, let alone you and your father and Mr. Elphinston, as I can make free with to say what I think. When I was a little lad, Miss Dora, my mother—and there wasn't a better mother nowhere, nor a carefuller, nor a kind-hearteder—had used to make me all my clothes—for there wasn't a tailor this side of Shagmouth, and they was always the same pattern: knee-breeches and a little blue short coat as buttoned round me with a belt, same as you never see them now-a-days."

I had seen the pictures of them in an old story-book of my mother's, but I did not interrupt Joe to tell him so.

"And I was a hearty bairn; and what with sea air and porridge, and a bit of bacon now and then, when we could get it, and plenty of good milk, I was never done growing; and first the coat got short in the arms, and my mother had to put a

bit in to keep my wrists from showing ; and then it took narrow in the neck, and she had to set a new collar on, top of the old one ; and then I grew that big, while it wouldn't meet round me, and the buttons had to be shifted, and a patch to give me room in the front ; and at last I says, 'Mother,' says I, 'this won't do any longer. You'll have to mend it with a new 'un, for all the lads on the beach are shouting at me.' And so they were, Miss Dora, for I was all over bits and patches, and not to say decently covered, for as many of 'em as there were. And she off to Shagmouth for the stuff, and made me a bran span new one, and a rare good 'un too ; and I felt pretty near a man, I can tell you, first time I turned out in it."

"Ah, Joe, I begin to see now."

"Yes, Miss, I thought you would. And there was no harm in my axing for the coat —and I wasn't a bit worse lad to my mother

after I had got it, neither. And I think that's something the way with us now, Miss Dora. We've been wearing the coat while it's got over-small for us, and there's been a bit put here, and another bit there, and the buttons shifted, and the seams let out; but it don't fit comfortable, and we don't look comfortable in it; and I'm thinking the best thing mother could do would be to make us a new one, and leave us plenty of room to grow. I'm not particular about the cut, so long as she makes it herself, and leaves the lad plenty of room to grow. But you may depend upon it, Miss Dora, if you don't make him one, he'll never wait much longer. The old one will have to go. By what I can make out, he hasn't walked easy in it this many a year past; and if mother don't set to and see to it, he'll rig himself out in such a suit as she won't know him for her own bairn again."

I could not help laughing at the home-

spun originality of Joe's illustrations, whilst yet I saw the deep foundation of common sense underlying them. However, the good man had had his say. He did not want to be argued with, but only to get rid of the weight which had been accumulating on his mind ever since the hearing of Mr. Wrighton's sermon. I did tell him, though, that I wished he could have the use of the Shagmouth church pulpit for a Sunday or two, to teach the people there, in as homely fashion as he had taught me, the truth that had visited him during his musings.

"Ay, Miss Dora, I could tell un a deal," said the old man, simply. "I'm that full sometimes when I'm set studying about these here things, while I seem as if I couldn't keep it in no longer, and I want everybody else to see it same as I see it myself. But I ax your pardon for keeping you all this time, and you the lady you are, as can sit at your own fireside and

hear it a deal better. I looked hard at your father, Miss Dora, while that sermon was agate, and, by what I could see, it didn't go down easy with him. No, nor wouldn't with Mr. Elphinston neither, if he'd heard it."

But at that very moment our new curate himself came up to the cottage door, and I left them to settle matters between them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AND so the Winter months passed on, and nothing jarred upon our peace. Neither wars nor rumours of wars came to us from without. Mr. Collinson seemed to have settled down into a state of quietude as regarded pulpit ministrations, at least there were no more private interviews, no more hints about conscientious scruples, no more Cliff conversations, sending John Elphinston home with a weight on his mind and a cloud upon his brow. We attributed this to the improved state of Mr. Collinson's health, his former remarks having been made just when he was on the

point of a severe bilious attack ; and under such circumstances men's theological views naturally become more gloomy.

The only unkindly remarks which were ever, to our knowledge, made about Mr. Elphinston now, came from people who considered themselves slighted by his want of sociability. It was so exceedingly difficult to get him out into company. He would rather walk a dozen miles than eat a dinner out of his own house, Hollycote excepted ; and that sort of disposition, in a man whose parishioners expect him to be continually putting his feet under their mahogany, is the forerunner of evil. As for getting him to an evening party, or securing his presence at the numerous ladies' committees, Dorcas societies, and private teas, which had their being now at Cove Rossington, the thing was almost impossible. He would do anything, see any number of sick people, dive into any depths

of mining misery or coal-pit wretchedness, rather than spend a couple of hours in a drawing-room, amongst a lot of agreeable young ladies, or assist in handing tea and muffins, and conduct a serious conversation afterwards. An unsuitable man for a clergyman, some of the parish said, shaking their heads. But then as these lapses from duty could scarcely be considered iniquitous, we did not trouble ourselves about the consequences.

Miss Fidger's marriage took place on the second of December. A week after that time Mrs. Ullathorne was established at the little cottage, and Mr. Elphinston had been asked to go in and spend a quiet evening with them, whenever he felt disposed. Since the announcement of her brother's engagement, Mrs. Ullathorne had cultivated my acquaintance a good deal, even to the extent of saying that she hoped, when she came to settle near us, we should

be like one family. I don't know whether Mr. Elphinston's habits of persistent, painstaking application to study, except on Saturday and Monday evenings, had anything to do with the frustration of this hope, but certain it is that after two or three spontaneous visits from Birdie and her mamma, during which he had not so much as come in to shake hands, even having tea sent to him in his own room, the intimacy gradually relaxed.

I think we were too happy and comfortable just then to trouble ourselves much about it, or to desire any society except our own. I wonder if throughout all that early Winter time, anyone could have looked in upon a cosier group than we formed on the Monday evenings, when John Elphinston was reading aloud to us, whilst Tyne and I worked, and my father rested with shut eyes in his easy chair. Then the long talks that we had

afterwards, and the good-tempered fights over our different opinions ; the delight of conquering or being conquered, of finding our own thoughts reflected in each other, or of giving or receiving new light on any subject—oh, it was all very pleasant ! I think of it now with a quiet contented thankfulness.

Then came Christmas, when our church must needs be decorated ; and as this was Mr. Elphinston's first year amongst us, we put forth a little extra effort on the occasion. Tyne was to undertake an inscription of ivy letters on a crimson ground, surrounded by a holly border, for the east window, and I advised her to be content with making it at home, fearing that perhaps if we all met in the church, where Argus-eyed Mrs. Ullathorne would certainly be present, some little unconscious word or look might betray the sweet secret, which hitherto had been so carefully kept.

But Tyne rejoiced in decorations, not only the making of them, but the putting of them up. And she rejoiced, too, in the idea of her own perfect self-control, which could keep John Elphinston just as far away as ever she liked. With a pretty independent toss of her head she put aside my old-maidish suggestion as to the wisdom of staying at home.

"No, Auntie Dora," she said. "You will see that I can be as stiff as a poker, and as cold as one of the stone pillars in the church, and nobody shall know a bit that John and I belong to one another."

That "John and I," how prettily it sounded! But then I told her that, if she comported herself in that extraordinary way, everyone would be sure to think that something had happened.

"Then I will behave to him just the same as I used to do before, and we will

make-believe that we don't care anything about each other. Anyway, Auntie Dora, I mean to go to the church and help with the decorations, just as I have always done, so, you dear good old thing, you need not say another word about it."

So, like a "dear good old thing," I held my peace, not feeling by any means convinced; and we set off to the church, provided with gloves, scissors, tin tacks, hammers, string, and all the other accessories of decoration, including the curate himself.

We were there before anyone else. There was a bright little fire in the vestry, with—shall I confess it?—a kettle of hot water thereupon, and we had taken claret and sugar and spice, with a supply of glasses and spoons, for decorating at Christmas is cold work, be it ever so much a labour of love. By-and-by Miss Collinson made her appearance. Then an un-

married sister who lived with Mrs. Guttridge, and evidently looked upon this as an occasion for displaying her best things; finally Mrs. Ullathorne and Birdie and Ted, who found us in the midst of arranging Tyne's inscription under the east window.

"Now this *is* what I call too bad," she said, with one of her sweetest smiles, "to steal a march upon us in this way, and get the prettiest part finished without letting us help. Birdie was so anxious to do something to that east window, were you not, darling?"

"Yes, Ma. But of course Miss Wear will do it a great deal better."

"Of course, my dear, we all know that. I would not for the world have you interfere with anything that Miss Wear has arranged. Only you see," and she glanced across to me with one of those confidential looks that always exasperated me, "it is

such an advantage to be at head-quarters. *We* thought eleven o'clock was the time."

"And so it was," said Tyne, who was holding one end of a rope of holly, whilst Mr. Elphinston nailed the rest round the crimson cloth; "only when everything was ready it seemed a pity to wait. Here, Birdie, if you like to hold this rope, you are quite welcome. I have been standing over it until I don't know whether I am carved in stone or not."

"Oh! that is so sweet of you!" said Birdie. "I was sure you would not be so cruel as to shut me quite out, when I wanted so very much to put just one little touch in under that window. Please, Mr. Elphinston, *do* tell me if I am holding it right. Don't be afraid of scolding me. I want to know exactly what to do to help you."

"You will help me more, then, if you

don't hold it at all," said Mr. Elphinston, simply enough. "It is so near the end, that I can do it better by myself. Would you like to do the letters in some of the windows?"

"Oh, yes, please, *anything*, only you must show me how to do it, for I am such a dreadful little stupid at anything of this sort. I never can do it unless some one is standing over me all the time."

And Birdie managed it so cleverly that Mr. Elphinston did stand over her all the time, whilst Ted engaged Tyne in wreathing one of the pillars. Poor Tyne! she did not seem inclined to linger about her work, and soon made an excuse for getting me down to the other end of the church, where, having finished the windows, Birdie had brought Mr. Elphinston to help her with the font.

"I tell my little girl she was just made for this sort of thing," said Mrs. Ullathorne,

who was looking complacently on. "She is in her element when she is doing anything in a church—are you not, Birdie dear?"

"Yes, Ma; and then, you know, Mr. Elphinston is so kind. He never gets out of temper with me if I do anything wrong. I am not the least bit afraid of him now."

And Birdie looked archly up into the curate's face, to let him see how very fearless she was. And then she managed to hit one of her fingers instead of a nail, and Mr. Elphinston must examine the bruise, and give his opinion as to whether it would turn black or not; and, of course, after that he must put every nail in for her, and hold it whilst she hammered it, Mrs. Ullathorne mounting guard, and recalling him to the scene of action, if ever he drifted in the direction of the chancel windows, where Tyne and I were laying our holly

wreaths—I mine in St. Monica's window, as I had laid it there Christmas after Christmas for so many years.

At last we went, just by ourselves, into the little vestry, for we were tired, having been at work so much longer than the others. As I expected, John Elphinston missed us, and leaving Miss Birdie to her own devices, joined us as we were toasting our fingers over the snug little bit of fire.

I don't know how long we had been there, for the time passes quickly when one is warm and comfortable, and, above all, in congenial company; and I am not sure, either, what we were talking about, when, without any preparatory rustle of drapery or sound of footsteps, Mrs. Ullathorne appeared in the vestry. I do know, however, that the door was half open, so that, before she came in, she must have seen us all there standing over the fire,

Mr. Elphinston in the middle, with his hand on Tyne's shoulder.

"Now really this is *too* bad," she said, in a pleasant tone of raillery. "Here you are, enjoying yourselves over a comfortable fire, while we poor exiles are pricking our fingers in the cold. Why did you not send for us to join you? But perhaps——"

And she glanced sharply at Tyne, who had come round to the other side of me, and whose cheeks were glowing with quite another light than that of the red fire.

"Perhaps I am disturbing you; it looks like a cosy little arrangement that strangers ought not to break in upon. I must apologise."

"Pray come in," said Mr. Elphinston, coolly. I think men always get the least share of annoyance in such situations as these. "It must be time all the ladies assembled for hot claret. Miss Leslie, you

shall be the hostess ; or shall we offer that honour to Mrs. Ullathorne ?”

“Not on any account,” said Mrs. Ullathorne, with dignity.

I felt dreadfully vexed, more so perhaps than either Tyne or Mr. Elphinston, for I knew better than they did the hopes which our pleasant little *tableau* must have dispersed in the mind of Mr. Surbiton’s sister. However, the spiced claret did what our self-possession could not do. The other ladies were called in ; there was a general praising and admiration of everybody’s work. Everybody thanked everybody else. Mr. Elphinston gave Birdie credit for having made the font look prettier than he had ever seen a font before, and he inquired solicitously about the bruised finger. Birdie gushed, as usual ; but Mrs. Ullathorne’s smile contained in its sweetness the essence of ten thousand penknives.

Finally the sexton came to sweep up the

holly leaves, and we all dispersed, wondering what the Christmas congregation would think of our efforts.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





